



Growing Blueberries in a Home Garden

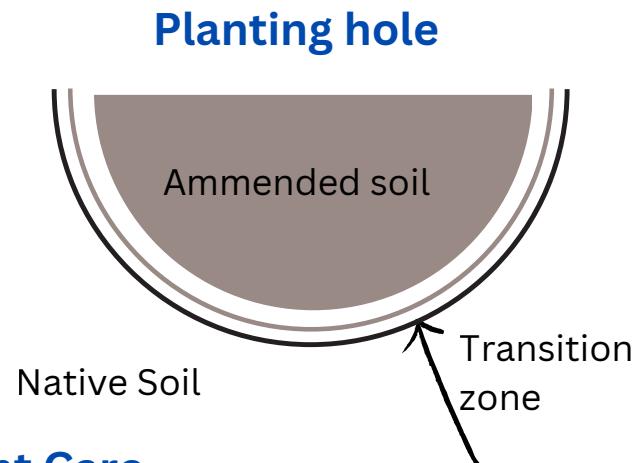
Blueberries are attractive shrubs with flowers in spring, edible berries in summer, and fall foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red. Varieties are typically highbush (*V. corymbosum*) that reach 4-6 ft. tall and wide or lowbush (*V. angustifolium*) that reach 2-3 ft. tall and wide

Site Selection and Planting

Blueberry plants require a sunny location and well-drained acidic soils. Blueberries require an acid soil of pH 4.5 to 5.5. Because the pH of most soils in our area are high the pH must be lowered to successfully grow blueberries. Home gardeners can lower their soil pH by incorporating sphagnum peat moss into the soil. Sulfur and other acidic fertilizers can also be used to acidify the soil.

When planting, dig a hole roughly 3-4 feet in diameter and about a foot deep. Mix about 30% of the native soil (removed from digging the hole) 60% pre-soaked sphagnum peat moss or an acidic planting mix and 10% compost. Adding elemental sulfur or other acidic fertilizers as directed into the planting hole is great too. With heavy clay soils, the mixture should be worked into the boundary of the hole to create a transition zone. Finish with a couple inches of forest mulch on top after planting. Annual soil testing to maintain acidity.

- 30% **Native soil**
- 60% **Pre-soaked sphagnum moss or acidic planting mix**
- 10% **Compost**



Plant Care

The upper 2-4 inches beneath the mulch is the sweet spot for the health of the plant. Check this area to make sure the soil is evenly moist and cool. This is also the localized area that needs to remain acidic with the addition of fertilizers and organic mulch (shredded bark, wood chips, aged sawdust, and pine needles) annually.

Pruning

Blueberry plants typically do not need to be pruned for the first few years. Remove any dead or low twiggy branches from the interior of the plant. New shoots at the crown of the plant is a good indication that the plant is uptaking nutrients. Over the fourth and fifth years and beyond prune out older base branches while trying to maintain 8-10 main branches from the root crown.

