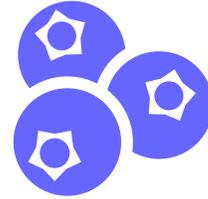




Blueberry Care



Blueberries can be a great addition to your backyard. The shrubs make beautiful plants with red fall color, and they grow delicious berries! The number one issue many people have with growing blueberries is having the right soil pH. Blueberries prefer acidic soils (pH of 4-5 is ideal). Here in southern Minnesota, we have more alkaline soils (pH of 7 or higher). Blueberries will start to suffer when the soil pH is above 5.5.

What do pH Stressed Blueberries Look Like?

Blueberries stressed by high pH will look weak. They will have weak stunted growth (or they may not grow any new shoots at all). Their foliage will often start to adopt a reddish tone as well. pH stressed blueberries may not grow fruit at all.

What Can We do to Make Blueberries Happier in Our Yards if We Have High pH?

We need to amend our soils! Its easiest to plan out how to amend your soil if you've done a soil test. The best time to do this when you're planting your blueberry. Incorporating sphagnum peat moss into and around the hole is going to be a good first start. Sphagnum will help bring your pH down quite a bit. The University of Minnesota recommends adding and incorporating 4-6 inches of peat to the top 6-8 inches of soil in a 2-3ft circle around your hole will be a great way to bring it down. If your pH is below 7.0 you can get away with 4 inches if you have a higher than 7.0 you could do 6 inches. After doing so and planting your shrub, checking the pH at a minimum of 6 months later can help you get an idea of how that has changed your soil. If you're still high, topdressing soil sulfur can help bring it down more too. This is often done in the fall as it isn't fast acting and takes several months to impact the pH. A common rate for soil sulfur is to broadcast 2 ½ cups per plant around the canopy line. Each product has different guidelines so follow your label carefully!

What do Blueberries Like to Eat?

Fertilizer recommendations can be more precise after reading soil test results. However, in general, many blueberry growers will feed their berries with Ammonium Sulfate. This is a fast-acting fertilizer that contains sulfur and can act as an acidifier as well! A feeding regimen after planting a new blueberry may look like this:

- Feed .1lbs of Ammonium Sulfate side-dressed per plant when your blueberry is blooming.
- Feed an additional .1lbs of Ammonium Sulfate another 6 weeks later.

Do this annually and add another .1lbs each year to each application until you reach .3lbs per application. If you use a wood mulch underneath your plant, you can go up to .4lbs to compensate for the decomposition of the wood. Once you hit these maximum values you can feed at this rate each year.

Its important to not feed your blueberry until it is blooming. Blueberries don't absorb fertilizer very well until they hit this annual developmental stage!

Other Tidbits

Blueberries have shallow root systems—you will find it very helpful to mulch your blueberries with a wood mulch to help hold onto moisture in hot dry weather and suppress weeds.

Blueberries should be pruned annually to keep it vigorous and happy! Remove any dead, diseased, or dying canes to their point of origin. About 25% of the oldest canes should also be cut down each year too to maintain vigor. The best time to prune your blueberry is later winter—February or March! Blueberries are slow to mature. They usually take 10 years to hit full maturity.

Blueberries do not need a pollinizer like many other fruits. However, research shows that having more than one variety can increase both the yield and the berry size. On average, off a mature blueberry bush, you can expect to harvest up to 8 pounds of berries!