

Home Grown Blueberries

Someone in the bank asked me if the 4-H Club was going to sell blueberries again. This reminded me that I had planned to write an article early to remind anyone wanting to grow blueberries to start now preparing for new plantings.

Blueberries are a little different than most of our plants in that they have special soil needs – mainly soil pH. Blueberries are an acid loving plant. Most of us are used to applying lime to our acid soils to achieve a pH of 6.0 to 6.5 which is where most garden and ornamental plants need.

Take a soil sample now if you want to plant blueberries next spring or next fall. Blueberries are going to need a soil pH of 4.0 to 5.3. If your soil test shows a pH of 5.4 or higher, sulphur can be applied six months in advance of planting to lower pH. Adding two pounds of wettable sulfur per 100 square feet should lower the pH by one unit (for instance from 6.0 to 5.0). Sulfur can be applied after planting but can't be tilled into the soil.

Another difference between blueberries and many other plants in our gardens is that I do recommend adding peat moss or composted pine bark with the soil in each planting hole. Use either of these soil amendments at 2-5 gallons per hole. You'll also need to wet the peat moss before mixing it in. Blueberries thrive in soils with organic matter which we typically don't have.

Once you have your planting location chosen and soil conditions corrected, you'll need to plan which varieties to purchase. For most gardeners, there's not that much difference in flavor between varieties, but you will need more than one variety of planting the rabbiteye blueberries. Rabbiteye, as opposed to highbush blueberries do require cross pollination. For our area, choose Austin, climax, or Premier for early season berries. To lengthen the harvest season, add Baldwin, Centurion or Delite varieties. With early, mid and late season varieties you can harvest fresh berries for up to six weeks.

For more details on the planting and care of blueberries, call me (706 384-2843) for a copy of "Home Garden Blueberries" or you can check it out on line at www.caes.uga.edu