

## CLIMATE

Blueberries like cold winters, warm-hot summer and good rainfall. They require a minimum period of winter cold, called 'winter chill'.

## GROWING CONDITIONS

Blueberries prefer 'poor' acidic soil with a pH of 4.0-5.5. They **must** have very good drainage and will quickly die if drainage is poor. Plants can be planted on mounds to assist drainage, and soil acidity can be encouraged by incorporating organic matter and mulches in the existing soil. The site should be open, sunny and protected from strong winds.

## WATER

Blueberries have a shallow fibrous root system. The soil must be kept moist. Water retention can be assisted by using mulches and some sort of irrigation. Drip irrigation is an ideal and economical method easily installed. Regardless of the method of watering blueberry plants the soil must be checked regularly for moisture. Irrigation systems do have failures.

## PLANTING

Spacing of plants will depend on the variety of blueberry you plant. The smallest variety, Sunshine Blue, should be planted about 1 metre apart, and the larger varieties up to 1.5 metres apart. Depending on variety plants will grow from 1 metre high, (Sunshine Blue), to 1.5-2.5 metres high, (other high-bush varieties). Organic matter and/or compost incorporated into the planting area will improve the quality and biology of the soil. Dig this well into the planting area. **Do not remove your own soil**; rather add compost and organic matter to improve it.

Purchased plants should be healthy and well grown. The roots should just fill the container and not circle in the container. The top of the soil in the container should be at the same level as the ground once planted. Be careful not to plant too deeply. Once the planting is complete water well to settle the plant. Watering in with liquid kelp or seaweed will help to give the plant a good start.

We find a 20cm pot size plant establishes better in the ground than a smaller plant, thus suggest that you grow a smaller plant on to 20cm size prior to planting out.

## MULCH

Mulching your plants will assist in preventing weeds and retaining moisture and will improve the organic matter in the soil. It will support soil micro-organisms. All this will help keep your plants healthy and maintain the acid conditions that blueberries love.

Suitable mulches include sawdust, straws, and woodchips including pine bark and chips and pine needles, oak leaves. In fact all sorts of natural things but **do not** allow the mulch to build up around the trunk or stem of the plant as this can damage the trunk and thus damage the plant.

## FERTILIZER

Blueberries are acid loving plants. They are sensitive to excess fertilizer. Animal manures added to the mulch are useful, but **do not** use fowl manure as it is too alkaline. Any organic fertilizer can be used such as fish and seaweed preparations. Rule of thumb is fertilize in spring and autumn, and a little at a time will not do any damage.

## PESTS AND DISEASES

Blueberries in this part of the world are relatively pest and disease free. Birds are the greatest pest and are best dealt with by bird netting either temporary or permanent. If you want the fruit you will have to net!

## PRUNING

For the first couple of years you should be primarily concerned with encouraging the plants to grow. In winter remove any weak, spindly or broken growth. Also remove flowers in spring to allow the plants to put their energy into growing. After a couple of years the pruning will consist of encouraging strong upright canes and juvenility, and removing weak twiggy growth. Keep the centre of the plant open to allow air and sun to penetrate. Fruiting occurs on 2<sup>nd</sup> year wood and older. Another rule of thumb is 'replace the old wood with the new'.

## HARVEST

Do not allow the plants to produce fruit in the first year after planting. Encourage growth. Once the plant is showing signs of vigour allow it to fruit but not too much. The clusters of berries will ripen progressively. To pick roll the ripe berries off the cluster leaving the others to ripen successively. Once the berries look blue they will hang for up to a week and the berries will ripen over several weeks. Use the taste test to know when to pick. We know you will enjoy your delicious blueberries.

## INTRODUCTION

Blueberries belong to the genus Vaccinium which is in turn part of the family of heathers, the Ericaceae family. Other members of this family include azaleas, rhododendrons and heaths. Blueberries species can be found wild in virtually all the cold and cold/temperate regions of the northern hemisphere and are also native to various islands and archipelagos.

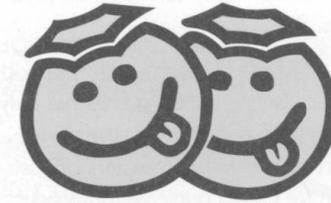
The blueberry plant is an evergreen or deciduous shrub. The wild American blueberry and the wild European bilberry flourish best as undergrowth in sparse woodlands. They like soils which may be sandy or peaty.

The American northern high-bush blueberry is the parent of our cultivated blueberry. Cultivation started in the 1920s.

At Emily Hill Farm we grow the American northern high-bush, Vaccinium corymbosum, which requires a high winter chill. Plants from our farm are suitable for southern Australia.

# *Emily Hill Farm*

*Magnificent Organically Grown*



## *Blueberry Cultivation Instruction*

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