

Blueberry Soils

BLUEBERRIES require an acid peaty soil and a water supply so balanced during the growing season that the roots never dry, yet always have air.

Acid peat, such as Blueberries need, may be defined as vegetable matter in an incomplete state of decomposition. Freshly fallen leaves, twigs, old wood and rootlets, dead but still sound, are quite acid. They are also full of plant food, but in a form in which plants cannot use it. As these leaves, twigs, etc., rot, they become less acid, and the food they contain is released so that plants can use it. When disintegration is nearly complete they lose their acidity.

In natural blueberry soils, various causes check the disintegration of dead grass, leaves, roots, etc., before the non-acid stage is reached. In such soils a non-acid condition may be brought about by the application of lime and cultivation, as for most garden crops. If such has been the case, or if the soil is not naturally adapted to blueberries, it should be mixed with partially rotted leaves or similar material, which must be kept

acid by annual applications of freshly fallen leaves or other sound vegetable matter, the leachings from which will preserve soil acidity. Besides maintaining acidity, annual additions of leaves keep up the supply of plant food.

Furthermore, a heavy mulch of leaves goes a long way toward maintaining a properly balanced supply of moisture, for it holds water in a porous mass through which air penetrates freely.

To Grow Blueberries in the Garden

Choose a location that is well drained. If it is not naturally moist, be sure water can be supplied during dry weather. Full sun is to be preferred.

Prepare the soil, if light and sandy, by thoroughly mixing a six-inch layer of peaty material with the top twelve inches. In heavy soil it is best to dig a trench, four feet wide and about a foot deep, and fill it with a mixture of two-thirds sand and one-third peaty material. Never use lime or stable manure. For peaty material, partially rotted leaves are recommended because excellent results have been secured by using them. Those

which rot quickly, such as maple leaves, do not answer the purpose as well as those which rot slowly, like oak leaves, pine needles, or laurel leaves.

The "peat" easiest for many people to obtain is partially rotted sawdust or the partially rotted chips and litter always to be found around an old woodpile. This is excellent material. Spent or live tanbark, used in connection with a leaf mulch, is recommended by a prominent rhododendron grower, who says, "It has proved an active agent in producing persistent acid conditions where the soil is not naturally acid." It has been suggested

that apple pomace or unsalable beet pulp might be suitable peaty material, and it would be interesting to have them tried.

Space blueberries at least four feet apart, otherwise the branches will interlace within three or four years. This checks the development of the plants and makes picking difficult.

Set the plants about half an inch deeper than they were in the nursery and water thoroughly.

Mulch, with peaty material, an area larger than the roots can possibly cover, taking care not to smother the plants while small. The roots will reach out farther from the base of the plant than the top does above it, and, under favorable conditions, growth is surprisingly rapid.

Maintain the acidity of the soil and the supply of plant food with heavy additions of leaves each fall. After the first season the mulch should be six inches or more deep. Never remove this mulch, but let it remain the year round and every fall add a new layer.

Water should be given as needed. When the foliage retains its rich green color until crimsoned by frost, the supply of water is very nearly correct. If the plants become too dry, the edges of the leaves wither and turn brown. When the blueberry has congenial, peaty soil and the leaves turn red or purplish before frost, the plant is too wet. It is an interesting fact that these leaves turn green again if drainage is promptly effected.

JOSEPH J. WHITE, INC.
NEW LISBON, N. J.