

Starting a Blueberry Patch in your Community Garden

A “How to do it” primer

A provision of a grant from Jefferson County Master Gardener
Foundation - given to the North Beach Community Garden,
Port Townsend, Washington

1. Choose a location in your garden

- Full sun is needed.
- Out of traffic (this will be a perennial bed).
- Ideally around 5'x30', with 1' aisles on each side (figure 1) or 8'x 20', with an aisle down the middle (figure 2).

1.

2.

- Able to enclose all of it with a netting cage.
- Do this the fall before you plan to plant, if possible. Amending the soil takes time.

2. Check the PH and other soil factors

- Univ. of Mass. website has detailed instructions.
- http://www.umass.edu/soiltest/soil_test_intro.htm
- Each test is \$10 and well worth it.
- Testing in the off season will give you more time to amend soil.
- Can take up to two weeks to get results.
- Results will be specific, for example: it will tell you how much sulfur per 100 sq. ft. you will have to add to lower the PH for blueberries.
- Do a second soil test 3-5 months later, to see if further amendments are needed. This one should be done by late Feb. or early March.

3. Amend soil if necessary

- Granulated sulfur is economical and easy to handle-for lowering PH
- Add all-purpose fertilizer
- Add some peat moss
- Add compost
- By March, soil should have lots of organic matter, plenty of nitrogen, and 4.5-5 PH.

4. Construct cage to protect the plants from all wildlife

- Deer netting usually comes in 100' rolls, so plan accordingly.
- Don't use bird netting. It isn't strong enough and is extremely difficult to work with.
- Cenex stocks a medium weight deer netting, 7'x100', 1" mesh, as does Hadlock Hardware and sometimes Henery's Garden Center. 1" mesh is necessary to keep birds out. Always ask for a Community Garden discount. The price varies between stores, \$60-80. (1" mesh is necessary to keep birds out.)
- Supports can be steel T-posts, T-posts with bamboo extenders, wire, old conduit, or whatever you have at hand.
- Leave one side open to facilitate planting, if possible. Can add that last side of netting at the end. You must cover the top also.
- Construct a swing gate to protect the structure and make access easier.

- Build it to last at least 15 years, easily the life of most bushes.



5. Purchase Blueberry bushes in Early April

- Good local source: Kathy Ackerman, Bayside Gardens, Brinnon. Kathy gives a discount to local community gardens. She sells a good variety of 3 year plants in containers or bags. Kathy also has a booth at the PT Farmer's Market, but you will probably get your plants before market starts.

- Baysidegardengal@hotmail.com 360-796-0335
 - Local nurseries also have blueberry plants.
 - Choose a variety of plants- early, middle and late producers-to lengthen your harvest time.
- 6. Plant the bushes**
- Allow 3'-4' between bushes, depending on the space you have available.. Can zig-zag them down the row.
 - Plants are shallow-rooted, a deep hole is not needed.
 - Have a shallow cup around each plant to facilitate deep watering.
 - Arrange soaker hose or drip hose around the drip-line of each plant, if possible. It doesn't have to go all the way around.
 - Add a mulch to keep weeds down. Wood chips or medium bark make a good mulch. You will scrape the mulch away when you fertilize, then replace it.
- 7. Watering**
- Check often to make sure plants are getting enough water. Soil should be moist 4-6 inches down.
- 8. Fertilizing**
- Your soil test will give you guidance on which fertilizer to use. If P and K are high, fertilize with blood meal or composted manure (just nitrogen). Otherwise you can use a high-acid fertilizer, one sold for rhododendrons and azaleas.
 - For amounts, follow directions on the package.
 - Kathy Ackerman recommends fertilizing each month during the peak growing season, May (blossom time) through September, when most are done fruiting. After fertilizing, deep water the bushes. 3-5 gallons per plant.
- 9. Ongoing care**
- Keep the bed weed-free.
 - Fertilize regularly.
 - Water regularly and evenly.
 - Remove any dead stems.

You should have fresh blueberries from early July to early October each year, though the first year will be a small harvest.

Resources

WSU "Growing Small Fruits for the Home Garden"

Includes a chart of different cultivars listing early, middle and late season varieties.

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1640/eb1640.html>

Bayside Garden, Kathy Ackerman, 360-796-4155, cell: 360-301-5745.

153 Sylopash Lane, Brinnon, WA 98320 Baysidegarden@hotmail.com

Cenex

9315 Rhody Dr., Chimacum, WA 360-732-4585

Gardens at Four Corners

321 Four Corners Rd.

Pt. Townsend WA 360-379-0807

Hadlock Hardware

901 Ness' Corner Rd.

Port Hadlock WA 360-385-1080

Henery's Garden Center

406 Benedict St

Pt. Townsend WA 360-385-3354

Secret Garden Nursery

13570 Airport cutoff Rd

Pt. Townsend WA 360-379-3900

Univ. of Mass.

http://www.umass.edu/soiltest/soil_test_intro.htm

Estimated Budget

Heavy duty bird netting (deer fencing)	\$ 70
2 Soil tests-U. of Mass.	20
Soil amendments:	
Compost, peat moss, sulfur, blood meal	30
All-purpose fertilizer	25
Blueberry bushes & fertilizer	100
T-posts, bamboo posts	25

Total	\$270

You can probably reduce this total by using cage supports that you have re-purposed and by shopping around to get the best price on bird netting and soil amendments. Remember to ask local merchants for a community garden discount. Most will give you 10% off.





