



Columbia Nursery

Blueberry Planting & Care Guide (Zones 3–5)

General Guidelines

- Sunlight: Full sun (at least 6 hours daily)
- Soil: Rich in organic matter, very well-draining, and acidic (pH 4.5–5.5)
- Spacing: 3–5 feet between bushes; avoid planting near paths or where lawn equipment may compact roots
- Pollination: Plant at least two varieties for best fruiting (even self-fertile types benefit)
- Site Selection: Choose a sheltered location with protection from winter winds, such as near a building foundation or windbreak

Soil Preparation & Planting

- Prepare an area at least 1 foot deep with 50% compost or well-rotted manure and 50% peat moss
- Ensure soil pH is not below 4.0 or above 5.5—test and amend at least one season in advance if needed
- Loosen roots before planting and spread in the hole at the same depth as the nursery container
- Avoid compacting the root zone or planting too close to mowed areas

Watering & Mulching

- Water deeply and consistently—never allow blueberries to dry out, especially during establishment and fruiting
- Fine roots die quickly when dry, reducing fruit yield
- Mulch with 3–4 inches of wood chips, pine needles, or grass clippings
- Mulch suppresses weeds, conserves moisture, and insulates shallow roots

Fertilizing & Nutrients

- Do not fertilize at planting
- Begin fertilizing in the second year with acid-loving plant food (avoid potassium chloride)
- Use a fertilizer with 3% magnesium or apply 1–2 Tbsp of Epsom salts per plant in spring to prevent yellowing
- Maintain pH with powdered sulfur or aluminum sulfate yearly

Pruning & Training

- Do not prune in the first 3 years—allow fruiting wood to develop
- From year 4 onward, prune in early spring before bud break
- Remove oldest, unproductive branches and thin interior growth to promote airflow
- Maintain 6–8 strong canes per bush for optimal productivity

Winter Protection (Zones 3–4)

- Wrap with burlap for wind protection (similar to roses or rhododendrons)
- Avoid late-season fertilizing to allow proper dormancy



Columbia Nursery

- Use straw mulch or snow fencing if exposed to wind

Tips for Success in Zones 3–5

- Choose cold-hardy cultivars such as Northblue, Northcountry, Northsky, Bluecrop, Chandler, Duke, and Blue Ray
- Remove blossoms the first year to help roots establish
- Keep weed-free and mulch heavily to protect fine root systems
- Net bushes to deter birds during ripening
- Expect best yields from years 8–9 onward; rejuvenate old plants with heavier pruning if needed
- Blueberries can be a garden staple for decades when well cared for—producing beautiful flowers, brilliant fall color, and bowls of homegrown fruit year after year!

Planting Timeline (Zones 3–5)

Activity	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
Plant potted plants outdoors	May 25–June 5	May 10–May 25	April 25–May 10
Apply mulch	June	Late May	Early May
Prune mature bushes	Early spring	Early spring	March–April

Common Issues & Solutions

Problem	Likely Cause	Recommended Action
Yellowing leaves	Iron or magnesium deficiency	Lower soil pH; apply Epsom salts
No fruit	Poor pollination or pruning	Plant multiple types; prune correctly
Weak growth	Soil pH too low/high, overwatering	Test and adjust pH, improve drainage
Disease/pests	Rare but possible	Diagnose early; use safe treatments