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BLUEBERRY CARE

The blueberry bush is a valuable addition to the edible or ornamental landscape. The attractive shrubs have multi-seasonal interest: twiggy form, glossy leaves that are deep green in the summer and fiery scarlet in the fall. Successful blueberry culture requires special attention to the soil, winter conditions, and seasonal pruning.

Soil

Acidic soil conditions (pH 4.5-5.5) are crucial to successful blueberry cultivation; unfortunately this is a soil condition rarely found in the Rocky Mountain West. There are several methods for creating a proper soil environment for blueberries.

1. Remove existing soil from the proposed planting area to a depth of two feet and replace with a 50/50 mix of top-soil and sphagnum peat moss. The addition of extra compost is also recommended.
2. Sink half a whiskey barrel or large 20" plastic pot into the ground, with additional holes at the bottom for drainage, and fill with the same soil mix as mentioned above.

The roots of the blueberry are shallow; therefore, cultivation should also be shallow. Bark mulch is recommended to conserve moisture and maintain cool root temperature. Regular but moderate watering throughout the growing season is necessary; however, overwatering must be avoided.

Winter Protection

Blueberries will thrive with adequate winter protection. During late November, apply 4"-5" of bark mulch around the base of the plant after the ground has frozen to protect the plant. Remove this mulch layer after the risk of frost has passed.

Watering is extremely important during extended dry periods in the winter or times when there is no snow cover. All fertilization should be withheld by the end of July; this allows the blueberries sufficient time to harden off before the arrival of cold temperatures.

Pruning and Establishment

The first year for pruning will be after the bush has been in the ground for two seasons. Pruning is usually carried out before budbreak in early spring. Select 2 or 3 healthy canes to keep on the plant. Prune out the rest of the canes. Continue this style of pruning until the fifth growing season. After the fifth season, continue to maintain the shrub at 12 to 15 canes. Prune out the two or three oldest canes every season and leave two or three new ones to take their place.