

Mission Impossible: Growing blueberries

If you want to grow blueberries, you must be a person who enjoys challenges. Blueberries do not belong in North Dakota, but you can fight Mother Nature and try to grow them.

Pick a sunny spot that is sheltered from winds. Get a soil test to find out the soil pH. If your soil pH is above 7.0 (and it probably is), you are headed for an adventure. If the pH is above 7.5, you are headed for “Mission Impossible.” In this case, dig out the native soil, going at least a foot deep, and replace it with a quality topsoil. Planting in a lined bed or container would be even better to avoid the native, alkaline soil.

Get the sulfur you need to drop the pH down to 4.5–5.5. Elemental sulfur is the most cost-effective source of sulfur, but can take a year to change the pH. Iron sulfate can change the pH in a month. The amount you need will depend on the current pH and the type of soil (sandy, loam or clay).



Follow the directions on the package.

Go to your local garden center and buy a bale of peat moss. Spread the peat moss over the site, building a 4–6 inch mound. Mix the peat moss and sulfur into the soil bed. The peat moss will add valuable organic matter and help to acidify the soil.

You will need to continue monitoring the soil because it will want to go back to its natural pH. Signs of distress will be small leaves or leaves that turn yellow with green veins. Expect to add sulfur every few years.

Choose hardy varieties; plant two varieties for better fertilization and higher yields.

Keep the soil moist as blueberries cannot tolerate drought. Mulch the plants—pine needles are good for this.

Last thing: I don’t want to sound too cynical, but it may be a good idea to plant some haskaps in your landscape, too. By the time your blueberry bushes are dead your haskaps will be established and almost ready to produce fruit. *DG*

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