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## **Tropical blueberry growing instructions**

More people enjoy eating blueberries than growing them, yet blueberries are exceptionally handsome bushes worthy of planting in the home landscape. Plants have a profusion of small blossoms in winter in tropical and subtropical areas or spring in colder regions. Leaves are glossy green in summer and have outstanding red foliage in autumn. Tropical blueberries need only 100-200 chill-hours and can be successfully grown in warm climates, even in South Florida.

Blueberry growing presents a challenge for most gardeners because the plants need special growing conditions. They require very acidic, well-drained soils, which are not common in most situations.

Blueberries grow best in a sunny location. Plants will tolerate partial shade, but as shade increases, plants produce fewer blossoms

Considerable time and effort in preparing the soil is a wise investment. Soil must be prepared before planting. When several plants are to be grown together, more satisfactory results will be obtained if an entire bed is prepared rather than digging holes for individual plants.

Blueberry plants grow best in acid soils (pH 4.0 to 5.0) that are well-drained, loose, and high in organic matter. Soil pH can be determined by contacting your local Extension office. Most soils in Florida will require amendments.

If your soil is not too alkaline (pH between 6 and 7), then just mix peat into the top layer of soil. Peat will acidify the soil and increase its organic matter content.

The soil water level should be at least 1 foot below the soil surface or roots will suffocate. If your soil is heavy and has bad drainage, then it has to be amended.

Different sulfur compounds can be used to acidify the soil. Make sure to test soil first and contact local Extension office or other professional place to calculate amount of chemicals. Some chemicals, like aluminum sulfate, are not recommended as high rates of this compound can be toxic to roots.

In addition to an acid soil, blueberry plants require a soil that is well aerated and has a high water-holding capacity. Most garden soil is not good blueberry soil, so modification of the soil is necessary.

In Florida very good results can be obtained by growing blueberry plants in raised beds, about 1 foot high. Some growers use mix based on pine bark. Bark has low pH, excellent drainage, and provides high organic content. During wet Florida summer roots will have enough air. Blueberry plants grown in such bed need more frequent watering.

Blueberry can be easily grown in pot. Make sure to use good soil-mix from garden center. Add 15-25% peat by volume to reduce the soil pH.