Blueberries for Sale

The blueberries have arrived! From farmers markets to roadside stands, fresh local blueberries are now available. So far, I have only tasted blueberries from Eastern North Carolina, but that is not for lack of trying. About two weeks ago I visited my parents in Rochester, N.Y. I decided I needed to take a ‘research’ trip to the Rochester Public Market. Fans voted that particular market as the number one farmers market in the nation for 2010. I thought for sure they must have the best of everything. Well, let me tell you, they did. I bought a pint of beautiful blueberries, got them home and looked at the label… White Lake, N.C.!

Blueberries are touted as a ‘super-fruit’. According to the United States Department of Agriculture; blueberries are one of the leaders in antioxidant content, are packed with vitamin C, and contain a day’s worth of fiber in just one handful. Blueberries are not only one of the healthiest fruit around, but they are also one of the easiest to grow right here in Robeson County and Eastern North Carolina.

Blueberries prefer sandy soil, full sun, good drainage, and a low pH, somewhere around 4.5. This lends itself well to our soil and climate here in Robeson County. If you are not sure about the pH or fertility of your soil, you can send a soil sample to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services to be analyzed for free. Your local Cooperative Extension Center has all the necessary boxes and paperwork.

Once your soil is suitable for growing blueberries, the next step is to select your plants. There are two main types of blueberry bushes, highbush (Vaccinium corymbosum) and rabbiteye (Vaccinium ashei). Highbush varieties are more cold tolerant while the rabbiteye varieties are more drought and heat tolerant. There is also a new group of plants referred to as ‘Southern Highbush’, which are more acclimated to the dry hot weather of our area than the typical highbush varieties. Remember that more than one rabbiteye variety is needed for cross-pollination and a maximum yield. Highbush varieties can be expected to begin ripening in late-May or early-June, while rabbiteye varieties ripen later in June.

Once planted, blueberries lend themselves well to organic production. Pesticides and herbicides are not typically needed if the bushes are well cared for. A yearly pruning during the dormant season to remove weak, diseased, and/or damaged portions along with a flower bud reduction of approximately...
50% is recommended. Bearing plants should be fertilized in early spring with about one cup of a complete fertilizer (i.e. 10-10-10) per plant. Using mulch around each plant will aid in weed control. Plants should be watered regularly for the first year and during dry spells there after.

It may sound like a lot of work, but bets are your soil sample results will come back with perfect conditions for blueberry planting and with a little mulch and some TLC; you will be good to go. Blueberries are also great plants to add to the landscape. Plants have beautiful pink and white flowers, gorgeous blue berries, and great fall color. So get out there, plant a few blueberry bushes, and if you’re adventurous, look up the ‘Pink Lemonade’ variety.

As always, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or call me at 910-671-3276. To learn more about Extension visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu. Happy gardening!