

# Best Practices for Planting Blueberries

*Successful replanting requires careful planning. Below are the recommended practices and resources to use to help ensure a successful replant project.*

## PRE-PLANNING

### Removal

- Evaluate the field being removed and thoroughly examine any variations within the block. Identify areas of weak growth or poor drainage.

### Soil Testing

- Test the soil one year prior to planting, and after the previous field has been removed.
- Amend the soil with lime or sulphur to adjust the pH as needed at least 6 months prior to planting. Re-test the soil prior to planting.
- Aim for a soil pH of 5.5 at time of planting, as annual fertilizer inputs will lower the pH over the life of the blueberry planting.
- For information on submitting soil samples in BC, please visit: [Nutrient Testing Laboratories | Province of BC](#)

### Drainage

- In moderate or slow draining soils, laser level the land with a slight slope or crown so that water drains from the centre to the headlands.
- In moderate or slow draining soils, install subsurface drainage pipes 2 to 4 feet underground prior to planting.
- Prepare raised beds for planting blueberries. Raised beds should be approximately 4 feet wide at the base and approximately 10-14 inches high, with sloped sides. Incorporate sawdust into the raised beds prior to planting in mineral soils.

### Irrigation Upgrades

- Consider upgrading irrigation systems, such as laying wires when sub-mains are exposed for future automation and re-designing irrigation zones.
- Consider installing micro-sprinklers in addition to drip lines for evaporative cooling of the crop during extreme heat events.
- Check out the Environmental Farm Plan and Beneficial Management Practices programs for potential funding towards upgrading irrigation: [Beneficial Management Practices Program | Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC](#)

- Depending on where your farm is located, you may require a water license. For information on applying for a water license, please visit Front Counter BC: [Water Licence - New - Authorization Guidance - Natural Resource Online Services \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

## Cover crops

- Plant a cover crop following removal of the old field and before replanting the new field to protect against soil erosion and improve soil structure.
- Select a cover crop suitable to the time of year, growing conditions and desired plant characteristics. For information on growing cover crops in BC, please visit: [Cover crops | Province of BC](#)

## REPLANTING

### Nursery Stock

- Purchase virus-free nursery stock from a reputable commercial nursery
- Purchase 1 gallon or 18 month old nursery plants that have 2 to 3 strong whips each.

### Planting

- Plant blueberry plants so that the crown is flush with the surface of the raised bed. Avoid burying the crown of the plants under soil or sawdust.
- Plant vigorous varieties at a spacing of 3 feet or more between plants.

## Irrigation

- Install irrigation at the time of planting. Place drip lines close to the plants during establishment.
- Check that the irrigation system is functioning and provides uniform water distribution.

## Alleyway vegetation

- Plant a perennial cover crop in the alleyways to reduce weed pressure, increase traction for equipment, improve water percolation, and to mitigate the impacts of extreme heat.
- For information on growing cover crops in BC, please visit: [Cover crops | Province of BC](#)

## MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

### Pruning

- Prune or stump baby plants in the winter after the first year of growth.
- Remove the blueberry flowers in the first 2 to 3 years of production to encourage better root growth and plant establishment.
- Prune plants annually in the winter after leaf fall.
- Prune stressed plants hard to encourage root growth.

### Weed Management

- Control established perennial weeds prior to planting.

- Apply sawdust to the surface of raised beds and plant a grass alleyway crop to reduce weed pressure.
- Avoid contact of herbicides with young plants.



*New blueberries planted in raised beds.*

## Nutrient management

- Avoid high rates of granular fertilizers around young plants, as high rates can cause salt burn and root injury.
- Use fertigation whenever possible. Apply at 10 to 14 day intervals. Use a higher per acre rate with young plants to account for inefficiencies in uptake due to the small root zone.

## Irrigation

- Avoid overwatering new plantings as this can encourage the development of root rot.
- Install and use soil moisture sensors to guide irrigation decisions during the growing season.

## Blueberry Scorch Virus

- Use field monitoring to time aphid sprays and to test symptomatic plants.

- Protect new plantings from Blueberry Scorch Virus through aphid management. Control aphids from late April through to August.

## Root Rot

- Root health is critical for plant vigour and establishment.
- Protect new plantings from root rot. This disease is often found in replanted blueberry fields. Avoid over-watering and apply registered root rot pesticides during plant establishment.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [BC Blueberry Production Guide](#)
- [Field Guide to Identification of Insect Pests, Diseases and Other Disorders in Blueberries](#)