What are these plants?

These are blueberry bushes, planted in early April, 2009. Eleven of them (the ones closest to the shed) are a variety called Blueray. The nine plants farther from the shed are a variety called Chandler.

Blueberries are one of only a few popular fruits native to North America. Different blueberry varieties have been selected (changed over time by plant breeders) to produce fruit at different times of the season. The earliest varieties can produce fruit in Wisconsin in July, while the latest varieties can have fruit into October. Blueray is called an "early midseason" variety, while Chandler is a "late-season variety."

How were they planted? How are they being cared for?

First, the sod (grass and its roots) were stripped off to a depth of about 15-20 cm (6-8 in) and removed from the site. If we had not done this, the roots of the grass would have competed too much with the blueberries for water. Over time, the grass will grow back into the area where the blueberries are, but by then the bushes will be big enough to compete well.

Next, the area where the sod had been was filled in with compost and mixed with the soil underneath using a spading fork. Then, about 250 g (8 oz) of pellets of organic sulfur was mixed into the soil where each bush would be planted (holes spaced 90 cm or 3 ft apart). This helps to acidify the soil — blueberries grow best at a pH (soil acidity) of 5.4-5.5, and the soil here is naturally closer to a pH of 7.

Bare root plants (purchased from Jung's, in Fitchburg) were then planted in the holes, and about 250 g (8 oz) of an organic fertilizer (bone and blood meal) was stirred into the soil around the base of the plant. The area around the plants was then covered with 15 cm (6 in) of leaves to help slow weed growth, and the plants were watered heavily (bare root plants come with very little root and must be kept wet until they have grown for some time). Plants were then watered (with a hose or by rain) weekly for a month.

Each coming April, we expect to sprinkle about 20 kg (40 lbs) of sulfur per 100 square meters (1000 square ft) of planted area, and a smaller amount of fertilizer. We will then cover the sulfur and fertilizer with more leaves. We also expect to prune the plants each winter, removing dead branches and cutting out some live ones so that air and light can get to the center of each plant.

The plants may produce flowers in 2009 and 2010, but will be too small to support fruit. As a result, we will remove the flowers by hand. The plants will be allowed to produce fruit in 2011.

Who is taking care of them?

These plants were planted and are being cared for by an informal group of volunteers. The group includes people from around Madison who like fruit of all kinds and want to learn more about it. New people are always welcome! To get involved, e-mail the group at: ehcg.fruit@gmail.com

Why were they planted, and who will get the fruit?

Many people — even gardeners who grow their own vegetables — are unfamiliar with growing fruit and may think that they cannot do so themselves. These plants were planted here to show you that ordinary people can indeed grow fruit, and this sign is intended to tell you a little about how it was done. If you want to plant some in your own plot, please go ahead!

Because the Garden Committee felt that these plants would serve an educational purpose, the plants and the supplies used to take care of them are being purchased with money from gardeners' plot fees. As a result, the fruit belongs to all gardeners. We do ask that you:

a) not harvest any fruit before it's ripe (blueberries are dark blue or black when ripe)
b) take only a small amount of fruit (a few berries) so that others may enjoy the same experience
c) be careful with the plants if you touch them
d) think about joining the fruit group to help take care of the plants! (see above)