Blueberry

Two types of blueberries are grown in Florida - southern highbush and rabbiteye. Because southern highbush varieties flower early, they are best adapted to areas south of Gainesville with some varieties growing further north. For colder areas that are north of Gainesville, rabbiteye blueberries are recommended. Blueberries are available April – July.

Fertilizing

Blueberries are fertilized using 12-4-8 with 2% magnesium (Mg). The following are general guidelines and should be adjusted based on plant performance. Slightly more fertilizer may be required if plants are heavily mulched. However, more often than not, cultivated blueberries suffer more from over-fertilization than from lack of fertilization. Use ammoniacal nitrogen or nitrogen from urea or organic sources, rather than from nitrate sources. Chlorine levels should be as low as possible, preferably below 2%. A special formulation called "blueberry special" is available in Florida and meets these requirements. Another possibility is "camellia-azalea" fertilizers. Fertilizer amounts and application times vary based on the age of the plant:

**Year 1:** The best time to plant blueberries is from mid-December to mid-February. Do not put fertilizer in the planting hole. After planting, when the soil is well settled from irrigation or rainfall, give un-mulched plants 1 ounce (2 TB) per plant of 12-4-8 with 2% magnesium (Mg). Spread fertilizer evenly over a circle 2 feet in diameter with the plant in the center. Repeat applications of fertilizer in April, June, August, and October using 1 ounce (2 TB) per plant of 12-4-8 with 2% magnesium (Mg). If plants are mulched heavily, use 1.5 ounces (3 TB) per plant per application rather than 1 ounce. Spread fertilizer evenly over a circle 2 feet in diameter with the plant in the center.

**Year 2:** Fertilize established blueberries in February, April, June, August, and October using 2 ounces (4 TB) per plant of 12-4-8 with 2% magnesium (Mg). Spread fertilizer evenly over a circle 3 feet in diameter with the plant in the center.

**Year 3+:** Fertilize established blueberries in February, April, June, August, and October using 3 ounces (6 TB) per plant of 12-4-8 with 2% magnesium (Mg). Spread fertilizer evenly over a 4 foot diameter circle, or broadcast in a continuous band 3 to 4 feet wide, centered on the plant row.
Pruning

Blueberries are pruned at planting, and in July/August and January/February thereafter. Blueberries should be pruned at the time of planting. Select the tallest, strongest cane and leave it unpruned. Remove the weak, "twiggy" growth at the base of the plant. If the plant has a large top compared with the root system, remove about one-third of the top by selectively pruning the least vigorous growth and cutting back the tops of vigorous canes by several inches.

While extremely difficult for some people, it is important to remove the flowers before fruit set occurs during the first growing season. This will prevent fruiting during the first year, but will promote strong vegetative growth and good plant establishment which will ultimately be better for your plant in the long run.

Established plants can be topped to control height and encourage branching after fruit is harvested. When plants are 5 to 7 years old annual thinning should begin. This pruning should be done in winter when plants are dormant and consists of removing about 25% of the older canes down to the ground. This will encourage new canes to sprout which will be vigorous in growth and more productive in fruiting.

UF/IFAS Publications

Blueberry Gardener's Guide

Blueberry Pest Management

Blueberry Varieties for Florida

Florida's Commercial Blueberry Industry

Protecting Blueberries from Freeze in Florida

Pruning Blueberry Plants in Florida

Reproductive Growth and Development of Blueberry

Weed Management in Blueberries