Blueberries for North Florida

Blueberries may be a good addition to your landscape for the New Year. They are native, the plants are somewhat ornamental, the fruit is good for you, they provide food for some interesting birds and they are easy to grow. What more could you ask?

Peter Andersen, UF/IFAS Extension Deciduous Fruit Crops Specialist and Researcher at the North Florida Research and Education Center in Quincy, provides the following on blueberries for North Florida in today’s article.

The rabbiteye blueberry (Vaccinium ashei) is native to north Florida and many southeastern states. Rabbiteye blueberries have been grown commercially in north Florida for many years. It is well adapted to the humid climate of the southeastern United States. It is resistant to most insect and disease pests and is well adapted to sustainable agriculture. In fact it is one of the few fruit crops that can be grown organically with success in north Florida. The major requirement for successful production is that the soil pH must be below 6.0, although the best soils for blueberries have a pH from 4.5 to 5.5.

The application of elemental sulfur before planting is the best method to reduce soil pH. The ideal soil is a well drained sandy loam with a clay hardpan 12 to 24 inches below the surface. The application of pine bark often enhances blueberry production. It serves as a means to control weeds, conserve moisture and to reduce soil pH.

Recommended cultivars for north Florida include early ripening (ripen mid May through early June) and mid to late ripening cultivars (ripen early June to mid July). The earlier ripening cultivars usually bloom before late ripening cultivars and are therefore more susceptible to spring frosts. Spring frosts can be mitigated by overhead irrigation during bloom when temperatures are less than 32º F.

It is best to plant at least two cultivars for cross pollination. The best early ripening cultivars in north Florida include Beckyblue, Bonita and Climax. The best mid to late ripening blueberry cultivars for north Florida include Brightwell, Powderblue, Premier and Tifblue. The characteristics of each cultivar are summarized below.

**Beckyblue:** It has high vigor. Beckyblue is prone to frost damage in north Florida. Berries have a good color are medium to large in size and have a good firmness.

**Bonita:** Bonita has moderate vigor. Berry characteristics are similar to Beckyblue.

**Climax:** It has moderate vigor. Berries ripen at about the same time thus facilitating harvesting. Climax blooms just after Beckyblue and Bonita. Fruit are moderately sized.

**Brightwell:** It is an excellent blueberry cultivar with a mid ripening period. It has high vigor and yields. Fruit are moderate in size with good flavor. Berry ripening is just after Bonita.
**Powderblue:** It has moderate to high vigor with a moderately high yield potential. Powderblue is late ripening and ripens with Tifblue, although fruit quality is slightly better.

**Premier:** It has high vigor and high yields and produces a mid season berry. Berries are slightly larger than average in size with good color and flavor.

**Tifblue:** Tifblue is a late ripening rabbiteye cultivar with high vigor and yields. Its major limitation is that some berries may crack if a dry period is followed by rainfall.

For additional information on growing blueberries, contact your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or access an online publication at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG359](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG359).

Larry Williams
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