

eLearning: Pilot project for blueberry growers in BC

New growers are entering our industry every year from different cultures/backgrounds. It is evident that there is lack of knowledge on BC blueberry production practices. Prior farming experience and knowledge may not apply to the current industry. We need to bridge this gap in an innovative and effective manner. This project aims to develop Multilanguage tools in different formats such as videos, printed material and multimedia. As a result of this pilot program, growers and industry stakeholders will be better informed, environmentally-aware, innovative and market-responsive to their industry.




Connect Learn Grow




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The Basics of Pruning

Understanding Blueberry Production

 Blueberry plants produce fruit on branches that were produced the previous year (In essence, fruit is produced on year-old wood)

 The most productive canes are around 3 years old

 Wood that is over four years begins to lose vigor and eventually becomes unproductive

Why to Prune Blueberries



To balance fruiting and the production of new wood for the following years+



To maintain the vigor and productivity of bushes



To minimize diseases of the plants



To maintain large fruit size and quality



To develop an appropriate growth habit for harvesting (mechanical or hand pick)



When to Prune Blueberries

Plant stages:

1-2 year old plants

- remove flower buds (to promote vegetative growth)
- remove all diseased or injured canes

3-7 year old plants, young bushes

- remove all non-vigorous growth (light prune)
- remove 10 to 20 %

Mature bushes, 10 years +

- remove all diseased or injured canes
- remove or cut back some of the oldest and least vigorous canes
- remove low branches and soft wood
- thin out and tip



General Pruning Procedures


- Remove all diseased or injured canes
- Remove or cut back some of the oldest and least vigorous canes
- Remove low branches and soft wood
- Thin out and tip

When to Prune Blueberries

 At any time while blueberries are dormant

The carbohydrates produced in the fall will have time to move into the crown and roots

 From November to late February in our area

 After the chance of severe cold is over and before new growth has begun; when the leaves are mostly off plants

Pruning Tools

 Small/large hand loppers/pruning shears

 Power/electrical pruning equipment
(it will speed the pruning process, but you should be an experienced pruner before using this equipment or over pruning may result)

 Goggles






 Gloves

 Insulated boots

 Warm clothing

Before Pruning

You should consider:

-  Assess the plants overall vigor
-  Check the stage of growth of your crop
-  Check your cultivar/variety's growth habits (erect-growing vs. spreading varieties)
-  Hire a crop advisor if you are an inexperienced grower
-  Adjust your pruning according to your harvesting procedure (mechanical-hand pick)

For mechanical harvesting: keep the base of the plant narrow and prune for upright branches and open centre (catcher plates will stay recover more berries)

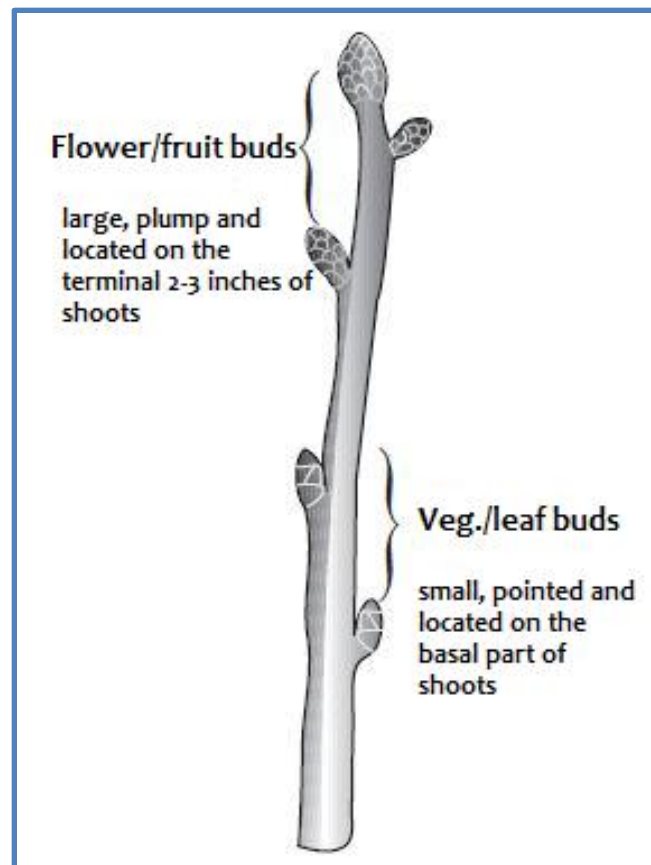


Pruning Young Blueberries

For at least the first two-three years following planting, blueberries should not be allowed to bear fruit.

Remove flower buds to promote vegetative growth. This can be achieved by rubbing off the fruit buds, or by pruning the tips of shoots where the flower buds are located.

Weak, low-growing shoots should be also removed.



The objective of pruning in early years are to promote both plant survival and growth

Pruning Young Blueberries

In year 2-3, remove all non vigorous growth and concentrate potential crop on small number of thick, fruiting shoots.

Take out any dead, dying and diseased wood.

In subsequent years, continue light pruning until the plants reach full size.

The blueberry plant should be in full production by the sixth or eighth year depending on cultivar, management, crop to cane production balance, etc. (I disagree with this statement)

The objective of pruning when plants reached full size are to promote fruit yields and quality, as well as maintain plants within desired size limits.

Pruning Mature Bushes

Mature bushes (8+ years old) start to lose productivity as more leaves are required to support a given amount of fruit on those canes.

Remove all diseased or injured canes.

Remove or cut back the oldest and least vigorous canes at the ground level or to a strong side shoot near the ground.

Remove low branches and soft wood.

Thin out by removing clusters of twiggy growth and rubbing off small weak laterals.

Prune out crossing branches and excess wood in the centre.

Aim for a plant with upright growth habit, open canopy to allow good air movement (less disease), light and spray penetration

Final comments about pruning

Only experience can tell you how many shoots a particular variety of a particular age can carry and still perform well. It is probably better in most instances to prune too lightly than too heavily.

Excessive pruning will increase the size of berries but will decrease total production. On the other hand, very light pruning, or none will result in more but smaller berries and a reduction of the new vegetative growth essential for future fruit production



*Pruning is an investment in the plants future health and productivity.
Pruning when done on an annual basis will ensure consistent production of quality berries, good fruit load and is an effective tool for pest management.*





For more information

-*Basics of pruning* (video) 2013, Episode 2.

May be viewed or downloaded from the web. Visit our website and look for the eLearning program: <http://www.bcblueberry.com/>

Copies of our publications and videos are also available in our office. Contact us by fax (604-864-2197); e mail: (research@bcblueberry.com), or phone (604-864-2117)

-*Berry production guide*. BCAGRI. <http://productionguide.agrifoodbc.ca/guides/14>

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