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It's All or Nothing at All

This summer has been hot, too hot. Right now it is also dry, too dry. And earlier it was wet, too wet. We are living in a world of extremes and unpredictability. That makes planning difficult. Things we would normally don't apply. As Billy Joel once sang, "Too high or too low/There ain't no in-betweens ". And, if it wasn't bad enough already, El Niño is on its way. Winter isn't coming fast enough! But, while we swelter we will have a muscadine field day that I encourage you to attend — because it's fun! Also in this issue are some new extension and research works that may be of interest to you. Know that even though things are tough, MSU and USDA-ARS are still investing in blueberry (and other small fruit) research and extension programs. We are writing grants to get more funding and we are excited about future projects and educational events. As always, we look forward to seeing you soon.

2026 Muscadine Field Day

If you are interested in coming to the annual MSU Muscadine Field Day, it will be held Thursday August 27 at the MSU McNeill Research Station (**7 Ben Gill Rd., Carriere, MS** — across from Jack's Fish House). The program is from **9am-11am** with registration starting at 8:30am. Attendees will hear about topics ranging from pest control and cultivar selection to exciting future research and new insects. After the education program, you will get to sample the muscadine fruit in the vineyard and take home a 1-gallon bag (subject to completing a program evaluation form). As a bonus you can look at our bunch grape vines as well as passionfruit vines also planted in the same vineyard. There is no cost to attend. Bring water, a chair, and sunscreen if so desired. So, come on out and see us on August 27.

See: <https://extension.msstate.edu/news/feature-story/2026/muscadine-field-day-set-for-aug-27>

Early-ripening Blueberry Production Using a High Tunnel in Central Alabama

J. Spiers, M. Trandel-Hayse, and L. Speer — Auburn University

Identifying blueberry cultivars that are best suited for particular regions of the southeast US is a critical need. The performance of early-ripening blueberry cultivars in open field and high tunnel cultivation was evaluated to determine feasibility of expanding blueberry marketing windows. Spring frost is the most limiting factor for production of blueberries in central Alabama. Many stakeholders are excited about the new releases of southern highbush blueberries with enhanced fruit quality and production traits. However, many of these are not recommended for Alabama because of their susceptibility to spring frost. High tunnels can potentially be used to protect and enhance early-ripening blueberry cultivars. This project determined the yield and fruit quality of early-ripening blueberry cultivars in these two systems.

In summary, high tunnel cultivation of early-ripening blueberries provides many advantages. Protection from cold injury with the addition of heaters and fans inside the tunnel is a big advantage. Though cold injury was not severe during the 2024 and 2025 growing seasons, spring frost injury should be expected for many of the early-ripening cultivars and was experienced in the 2026 season. Protection from rainfall enhances fruit quality, as few split berries were observed under the high tunnel when compared to the field. The enhanced heat provided by the high tunnel allows for increased growth and expedites flower and fruit development, for earlier and greater yields. Heat stress in the summertime was a concern for this study but was not realized. We did keep the high tunnel sides open throughout the year and only closed during freezing events. Growers could close sides during winter months to potentially speed up production. Many of the cultivars used in this study are of very high quality and would make great additions to our current rabbiteye blueberry cultivars in production. Though harvest is quite early for ‘Optimus’ and ‘Arcadia’, the yields were great for both high tunnel and field in the absence of spring frost conditions during the two years of this study. The later-blooming cultivars tended to perform best in the field, even in the absence of severe spring frost injury. Of these, ‘Gumbo’ appears to be the best choice for field production to obtain good yields in May. ‘Indigocrisp’, ‘Keecrisp’, and ‘Bluecrisp’ have a firm and “crunchy” texture that is attractive to growers and consumers. Likely well-suited for mechanical harvest and postharvest longevity. They both performed quite well in the high tunnel, but also at or above average in field conditions.

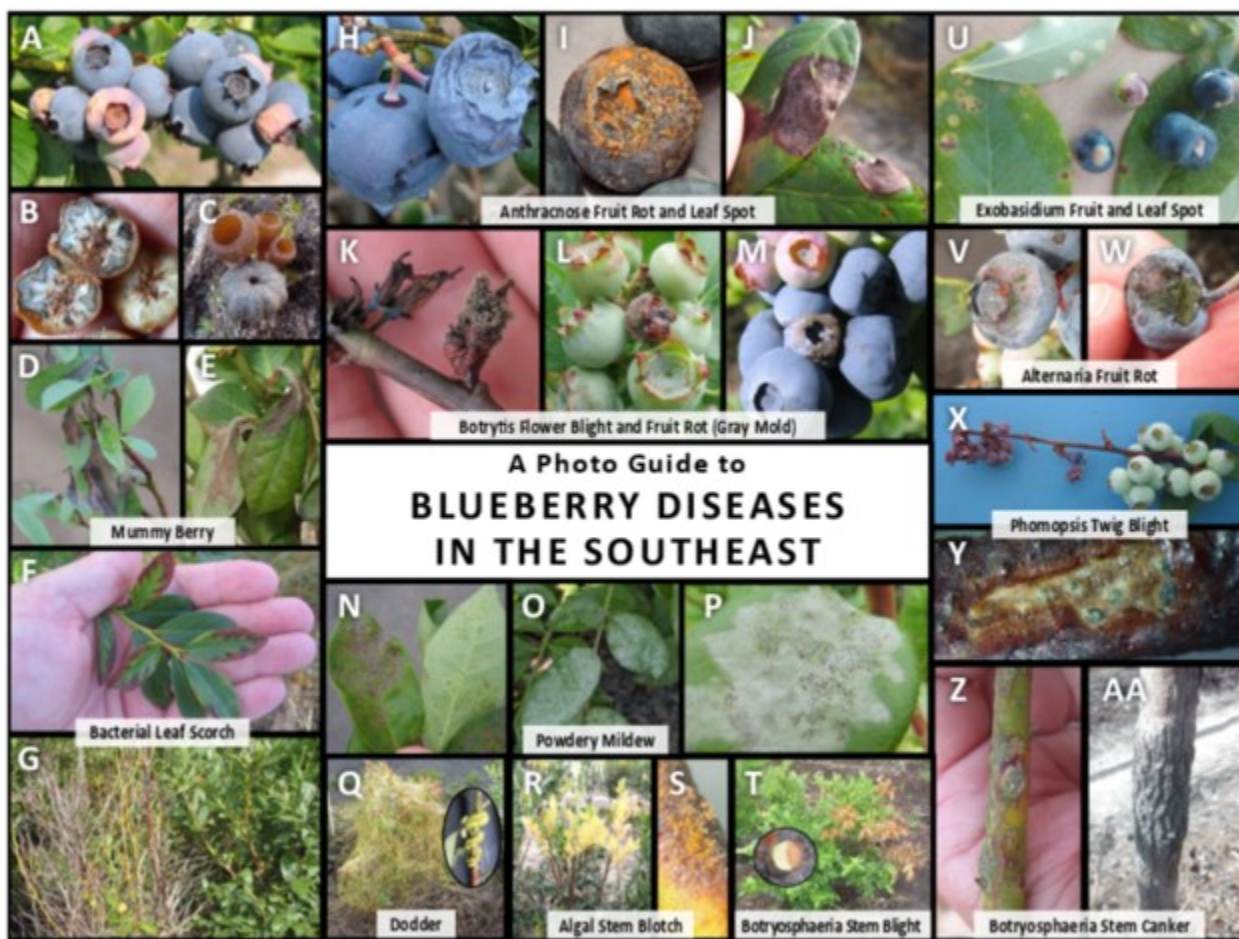
The big question of whether high tunnels are economical depends on the market and scale. High tunnels have significant upfront costs. However, they provide the insurance of saving your crop consistently compared to other strategies. In addition, you can get greater yields, larger sized fruit, fewer culls due to split berries and other fruit rot issues that come with rainfall, and earlier fruiting.

Read the entire study here: <https://smallfruits.org/2026/07/early-ripening-blueberry-production-using-a-high-tunnel-in-central-alabama/>

A Photo Guide to Blueberry Diseases in the Southeast

R. Melanson, W. Cline, C. Bollenbacher, L. Lopez, and A. Sial — MSU, NCSU, and UGA

This photo guide shows signs and symptoms of blueberry diseases in the Southeast. Download the PDF for the photo guide here: <https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/photo-guide-blueberry-diseases-the-southeast>



Propagation of Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) and Hybrid (Southern Highbush Blueberry × Sparkleberry) Rootstocks from Softwood Stem Cuttings in Florida, USA

V. Goles Varela, J.G. Williamson, and G.H. Nunez — UF

Abstract

Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) is a promising rootstock for blueberry production because of its tolerance to abiotic stress; however, its commercial adoption remains limited by poor vegetative propagation from stem cuttings. We evaluated the feasibility of propagating sparkleberry, southern highbush blueberry (SHB; *Vaccinium corymbosum* interspecific hybrids), and hybrid genotypes (F1 and pseudo-backcross 1, BCI) using softwood stem cuttings under greenhouse mist-bench propagation conditions. Experiments were conducted Jun and Aug 2024, and May 2025. The Jun 2024 and May 2025 experiments included 15 genotypes, whereas the Aug 2024 experiment included 10 genotypes. Propagation success was assessed as rooting percentage, total root length (TRL), and projected leaf area (PLA). Rooting responses differed strongly among genotypes. ‘Sentinel’ SHB consistently exhibited the highest rooting percentage (>80%) and largest root systems (20–40 m), whereas ‘RI’ sparkleberry exhibited complete mortality across all experiments. The pseudo-BCI hybrid exhibited intermediate but consistently high rooting performance (60%–85%), whereas most F1 hybrids rooted poorly, although select genotypes exhibited moderate rooting percentages depending on the experimental time. The PLA was associated positively with the TRL in 2024, although the relationship was weak. No significant association was detected in 2025. The broad-sense heritability of the rooting percentage was high ($H^2 = 0.97$), indicating strong genetic control of propagation success. These results are consistent with previous research indicating the difficulty of propagating sparkleberry using softwood cuttings, but suggest that hybrid genotypes, particularly pseudo-BCI, may offer an improved propagation potential for rootstock development. Hybrid genotypes may therefore enable scalable nursery production of stress-tolerant blueberry rootstocks.

Access the full study here: <https://journals.ashs.org/view/journals/hortsci/61/9/article-p1935.xml>

New Fruit Publication

E. Stafne, J. Perier, R. Melanson, H. Williams, J. Ryals, and P. Knight — MSU

Organic blueberry production can be a rewarding but often challenging undertaking. This is especially true in areas in the eastern United States, where high amounts of rainfall and humidity can lead to elevated disease and insect populations. There are options when considering this type of production system, but what does “certified organic production” mean?

Read the full publication here: <https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/production-certified-organic-blueberries-the-southeast>



Production of Certified Organic Blueberries in the Southeast

Organic blueberry production can be a rewarding but often challenging undertaking. This is especially true in areas in the eastern United States, where high amounts of rainfall and humidity can lead to elevated disease and insect populations. There are options when considering this type of production system, but what does “certified organic production” mean?

In short, an organic certification is a verification that the blueberry fruit (or any fruit) is produced according to [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) organic standards](#). These standards must be meticulously followed to ensure compliance. Growing crops organically can be an attractive proposition because of consumer willingness to pay a premium for the product. This publication covers some of the necessary considerations for organic production of blueberries.

Species and Planting Site

Rabbiteye blueberries are the most amenable to organic production in the Southeast. This species of blueberry is native to the Southeast and usually has fewer pest problems than other cultivated blueberry species. Organic highbush and southern highbush blueberry production is possible but requires more intensive management than rabbiteye blueberries. There are numerous cultivar options for all of these blueberry types, many of which can be found in [Mississippi State University Extension Publication 1758 Establishment and Maintenance of Blueberries](#).

Organic blueberry production starts in the planning phase. This includes properly preparing the planting site for



new bushes as well as keeping the soil in good shape for long-term production. Choose a location with full sunlight and good drainage. Creating berms or raised beds often can help if soil drainage is less than desirable. Avoid heavy clay soils or low, frequently saturated areas as these locations can have many problems. It is important to ensure proper water drainage, enhance organic matter, and adjust soil pH before planting because it is far more difficult, if not impossible, to correct these issues once bushes are in the ground.

Get a soil test well in advance of planting to allow for soil improvements to fully take place and have the desired effect. Blueberry bushes like high levels of organic matter in the soil; ideally, organic matter should exceed 3 percent. Unfortunately, many soils in the South do not have this amount of naturally occurring organic matter, so low-pH organic soil amendments like pine bark are used in blueberry plantings. Organic matter enhances beneficial soil microbial communities that may help stave off root rot diseases and harmful nematodes.

Irrigation is another important aspect of blueberry management. Blueberries need 1 to 2 inches of water per week by rainfall and/or irrigation during the growing season, especially when the crop is on the bush.



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Upcoming Events

Eric Stafne

Early next year (January/February) I will again plan to do the Mississippi Blueberry and Small Fruit Education workshop. Also, there will be an online webinar like we have done the last 5 years.

If you have any suggestions for speakers and/or specific topics I would love to hear them. The great thing about online webinars is that a speaker can come from anywhere in the world! So, keep it in mind.

As far as field days go, we had a Bunch Grape Workshop in Poplarville in July and the Muscadine Field Day is August 27 at the MSU McNeill Station (7 Ben Gill Rd., Carriere, MS). Be sure to join us!

Again, if you have any suggestions please contact me anytime.

