

Blueberry Pruning Basics

JENNIFER MORGANTHALER

Darr College of Agriculture
Missouri State University

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Blueberry Pruning

- Know the type
- Why?
- How?
- When?



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The Blueberry Plant

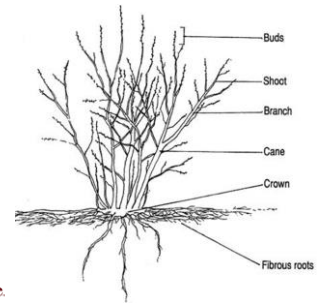
Types of Blueberry

- Highbush
 - Northern and Southern
- Lowbush
- Half-High
- Rabbiteye



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The Blueberry Plant



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The Blueberry Plant

Cane Age

- Year 1 canes – reddish brown during winter and are the fruit producing canes
- Year 2-3 canes larger diameter and darker
- Year 4 and older much larger diameter, gray color, rough texture due to lichens



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1 year cane



2-3 year cane



4 year and older

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Highbush Blueberry

Fruiting Buds



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Why Prune Blueberry?

- Develop a framework for young plants
- Remove unproductive canes
- Promote new growth
- Maintain plant vigor and productivity
- Manage crop load and berry size
- Reduce disease pressure
- Rejuvenate older plants

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Pruning Tools

- Long handled loppers capable of cutting larger stems
- Smaller bypass pruners for heading and thinning cuts, finish work and shaping young bushes
- Disinfect pruners



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Making the Cut

- Make flush cuts to avoid leaving stubs
- Pruning cuts are not treated
- Can time fungicide spray to occur immediately after pruning (especially if late spring or summer cuts are made on active tissue)

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When to Prune

- New bushes - prune at time of planting
- All others- Late winter or early spring just before bud swell for 1 year old to mature bushes
- Dormant season pruning reduced the chances of freeze damage at the cut surfaces and enables winter damaged wood to be selectively removed

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Getting Started

Steps to Prune Blueberry

- Observe the blueberry bush
- Imaging what it should look like when finished
- Remove all diseased, broken or dead canes and twigs
- Remove weak and twiggy canes that have lots of flower buds
- Remove short and low hanging canes
- Retain strong canes with best and large flower buds

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Getting Started

Steps to Prune Blueberry

- Start at Crown
- Open the Center
- Gradually remove older canes
- Start Thinning and Heading branches
- Goal is to have multi trunked bush with strong canes of all different ages emerging from the ground

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Starting at the Crown

- Find the crown
- Visualize a 12 -18 inch circle
- Remove ALL shoots of any age that have emerged from the ground outside of that circle
- Keeps the base narrow

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Starting at the Crown

- Remove low lying canes
- Remove canes that crossover or angle through the bush
- Should end up with a narrower bush and mostly upright canes

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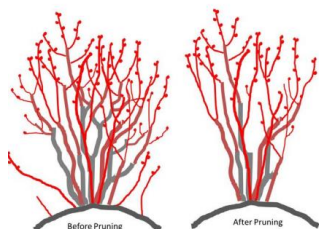
Starting at the Crown

- Open the center
- Can remove 1-3 large canes to reduce crowding, improve airflow and spray penetration
- Gradually phase out older canes that are larger and grayer in color
- Move quickly and make cuts close to ground

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After Crown Work



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<https://growinginfo@ams.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf?media=0>



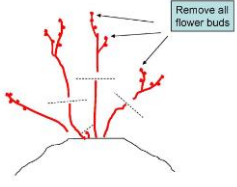
Thinning and Heading Branches

- As canes age they branch repeatedly
- Make cuts to selectively remove clumps of twiggy, brushing looking, thin laterals
- Head back any long whips or canes that are too tall
- Made with hand held bypass pruners

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Pruning at Time of Planting

- Prune or remove flower buds in the 1st year
- Cut back 1/2 to 2/3 of the height at the time of planting



Remove all flower buds

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<https://growingsmallfarms.oes.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf#dno>

Pruning at Time of Planting

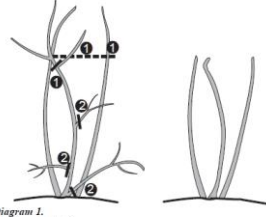


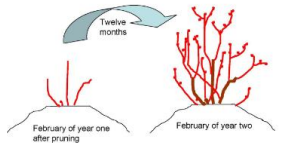
Diagram 1.
Pruning at planting:
head younger canes back to about 10 to 12 inches in length (1) prune off lower, shorter shoots (2)

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<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP284-E.pdf>

Pruning in Year One

- Goal to avoid fruit production
- Remove all flower buds
- Allows bush to grow vegetatively
- End of year one shrub has increased in size and produced more flower buds



Twelve months

February of year one after pruning

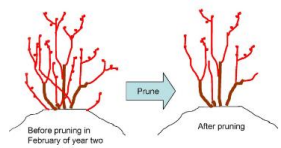
February of year two

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<https://growingsmallfarms.oes.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf#dno>

Pruning in Year Two

- Remove low lying or weak shoots and cross overs
- Keep healthiest, large upright canes
- Some flower buds may be allowed in year 2 if growth was adequate in year 1



Before pruning in February of year two

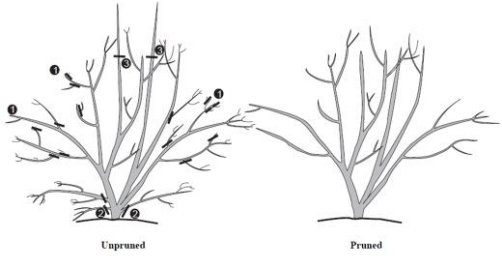
After pruning

Prune

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<https://growingsmallfarms.oes.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf#dno>

Pruning in Year Two and Three



Unpruned

Pruned

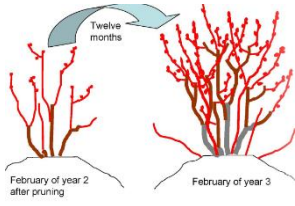
Diagram 2
Pruning the first 2 to 3 years:
remove fruit buds (1)
prune off weak and low-growing shoots (2)
head new, vigorous canes to about 4 to 6 inches below the top of the bush (3)

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<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP284-E.pdf>

Pruning for First Crop

- Allow a few berries
- Goal is still vegetative growth
- Form the structure of the bush for years to come



Twelve months

February of year 2 after pruning

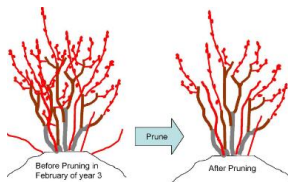
February of year 3

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<https://growingsmallfarms.oes.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf#dno>

Pruning in Year Three

- Bush is well established
- Still need to remove 40-50% of the flower buds
- Begin selecting new basal shoots that will replace older canes



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<https://ag.missouristate.edu/assets/MtnGrv/B44GrowingBlueberries.pdf>

Pruning Mature Plants



Diagram 4

Pruning mature blueberry plants:
remove weak, low-growing shoots (1)
thin the crown of the plant by cutting out about 20 percent of the canes each year (2)
head new, vigorous canes to about 4 to 6 inches below the top of the bush (3)

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP284-E.pdf>

Pruning Goals Mature Plants

- Up to 20% of the wood in a bush can be removed without decreasing yields
- 40-50% of the flower buds will be removed during pruning
- Berry number will be decreased
- Berry size and quality will increase
- End with a multi trunked bush with strong canes of all different ages emerging from the ground
- As an older cane is removed, a younger cane is already there to replace it

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Demonstration

University of Maine Cooperative Extension
David T. Handley
Extension Vegetable and Small Fruit Specialist
<https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2253e/>

- <https://youtu.be/fm6ZfpGy5oQ>

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Resources

- Blueberry Pruning, University of Missouri Extension
• http://extension.missouri.edu/blueberry/documents/Shared_Documents/MOBSchool/MOBSchoolWksByes8BPruning.pdf
- Growing Blueberries in Missouri, Missouri State University
• <https://ag.missouristate.edu/assets/MtnGrv/B44GrowingBlueberries.pdf>
- Pruning Blueberries, NC State
• <https://growingasmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf?wds=ng>
- Pruning Blueberry Bushes, The Ohio State University
• <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/hyp-1430>
- Pruning Blueberries, University of Tennessee
• <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP284-E.pdf>

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Questions

Jennifer Morganthaler
Missouri State University
Darr College of Agriculture
Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station
9740 Red Spring Road
Mountain Grove, Mo 65711
jennifermorganthaler@missouristate.edu
417-547-7517

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