



Blueberry Pruning Basics



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Blueberry Pruning

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





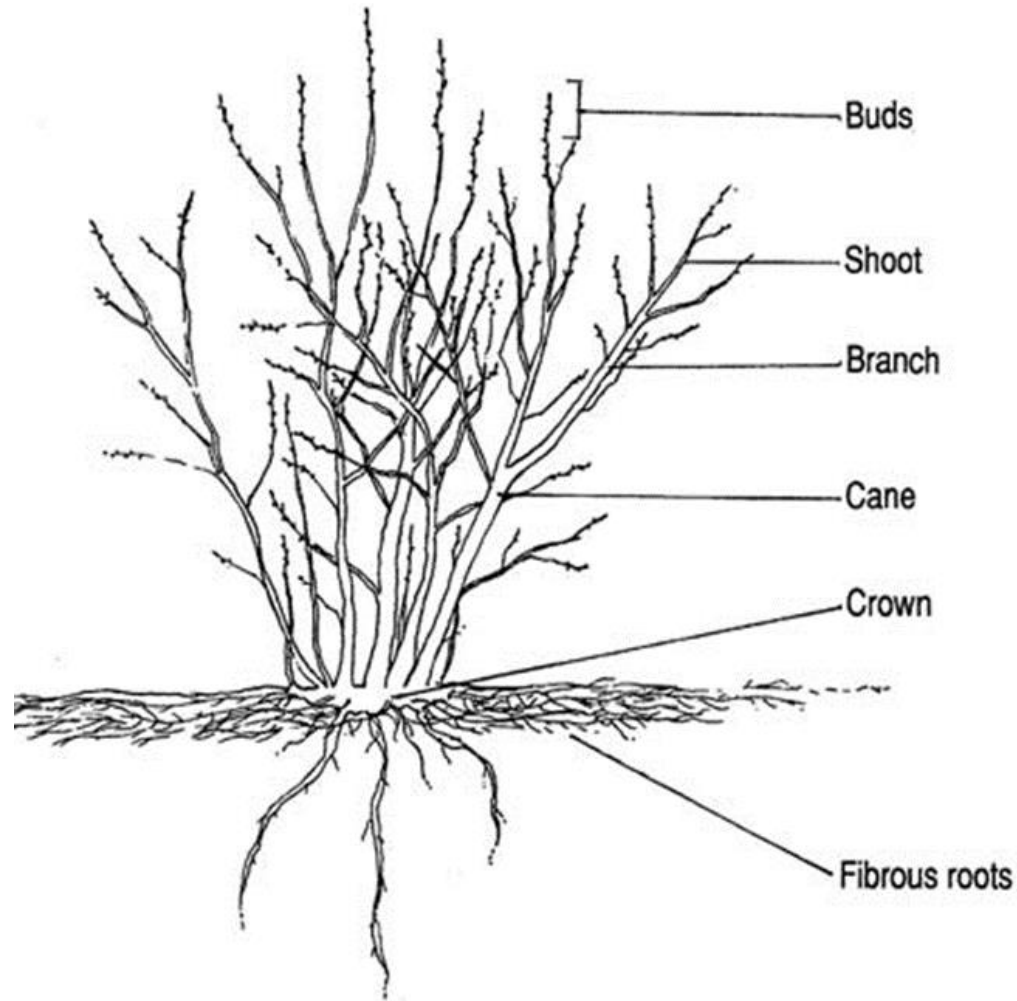
The Blueberry Plant

Types of Blueberry

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



The Blueberry Plant



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





1 year cane



2-3 year cane

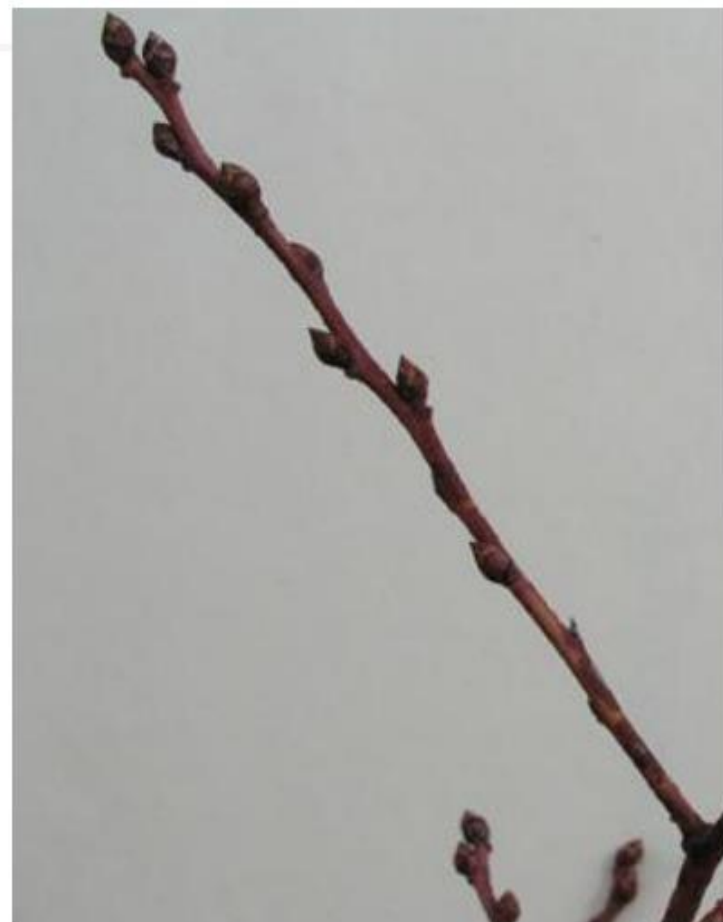


4 year and older



Highbush Blueberry

Fruiting Buds





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



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





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)



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



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



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



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



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

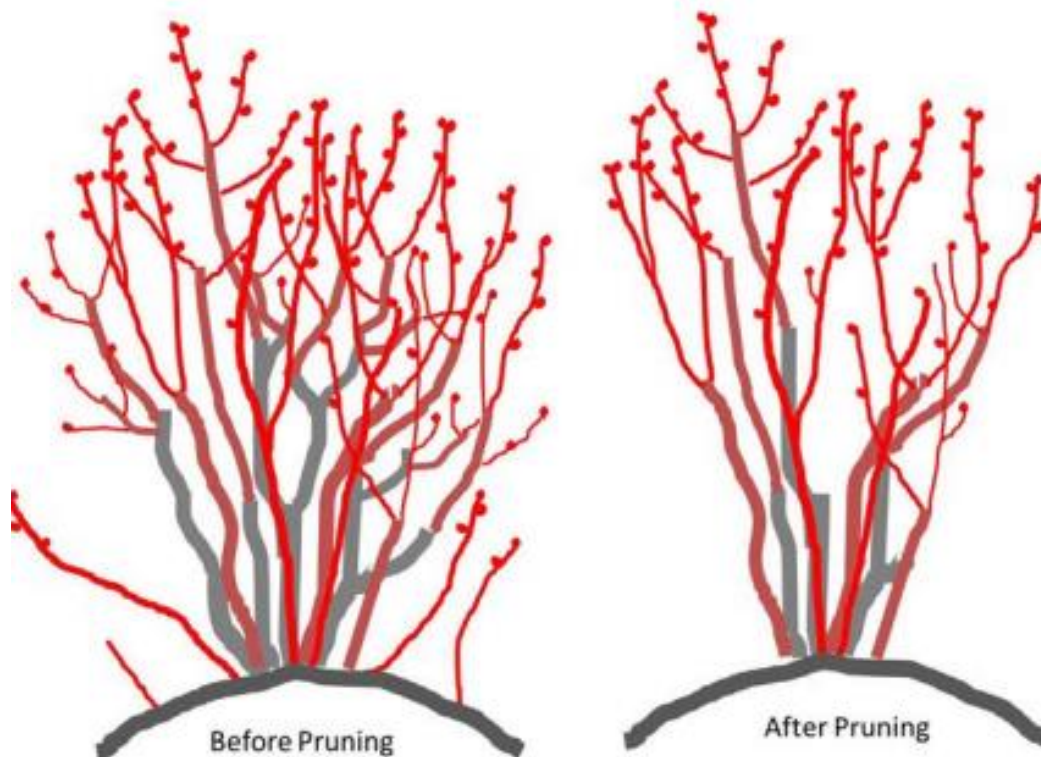


Starting at the Crown

- 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



After Crown Work



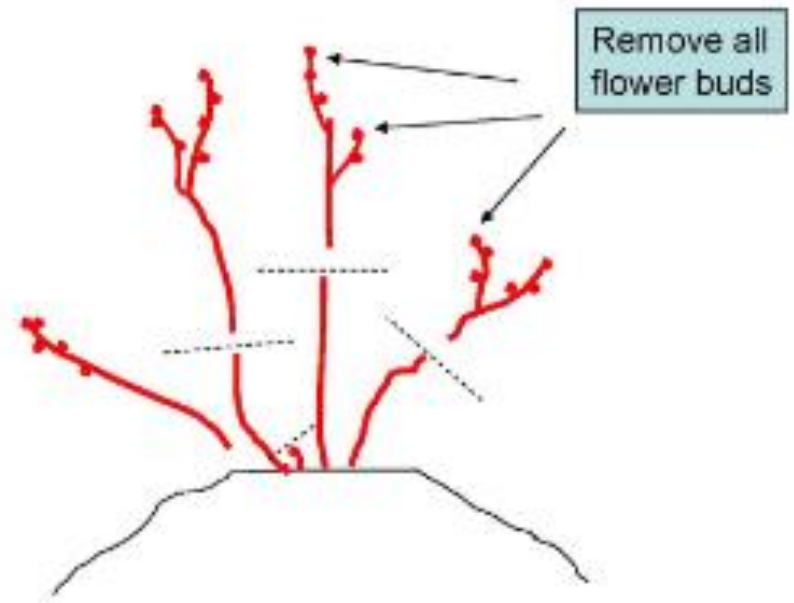


Thinning and Heading Branches

- 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

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



Pruning at Time of Planting

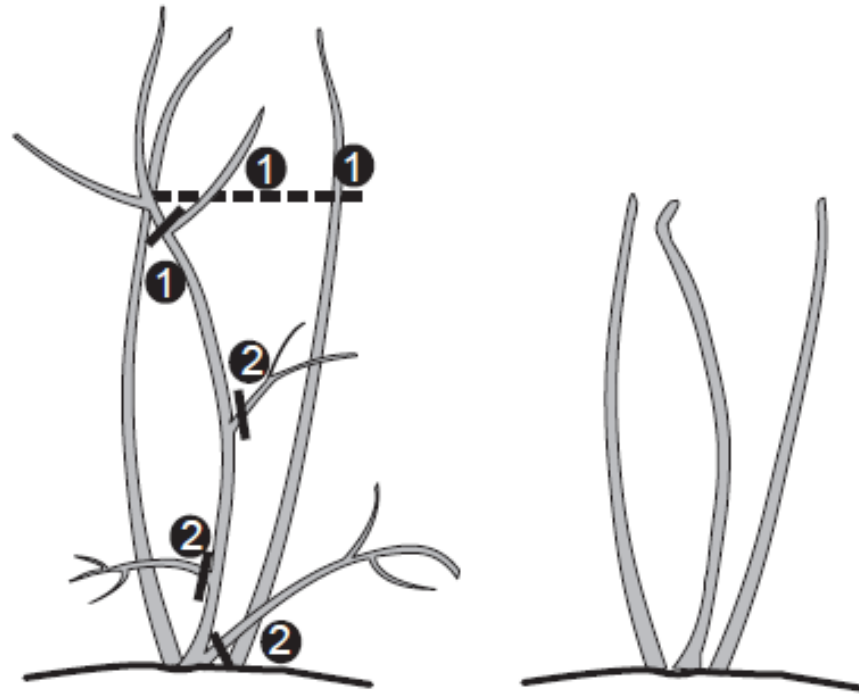


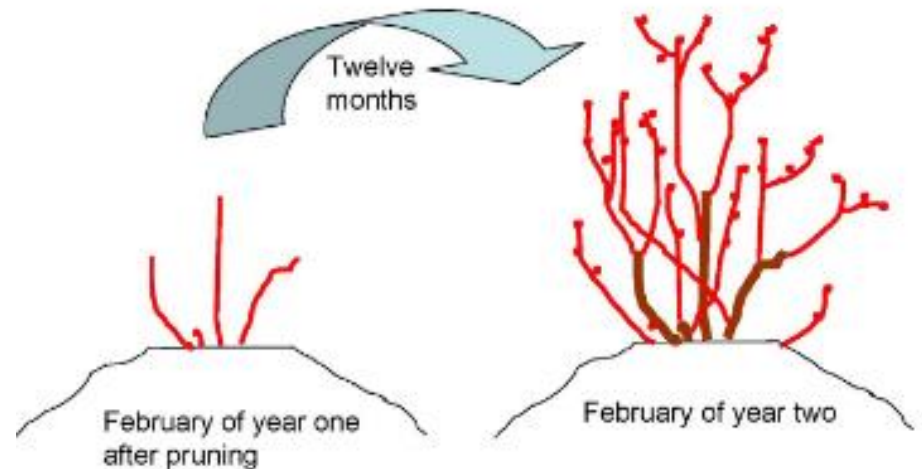
Diagram 1.

Pruning at planting:

head younger canes back to about 10 to 12 inches in length (1) prune off lower, shorter shoots (2)

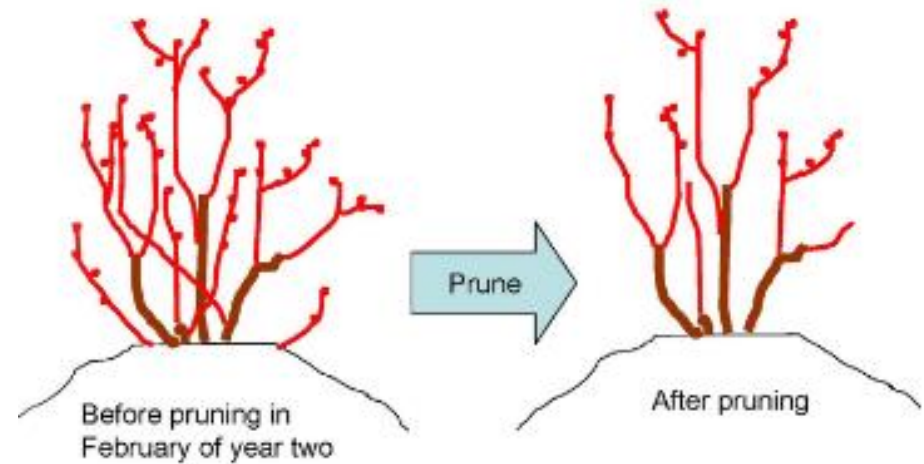
Pruning in Year One

- 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



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



Pruning in Year Two and Three

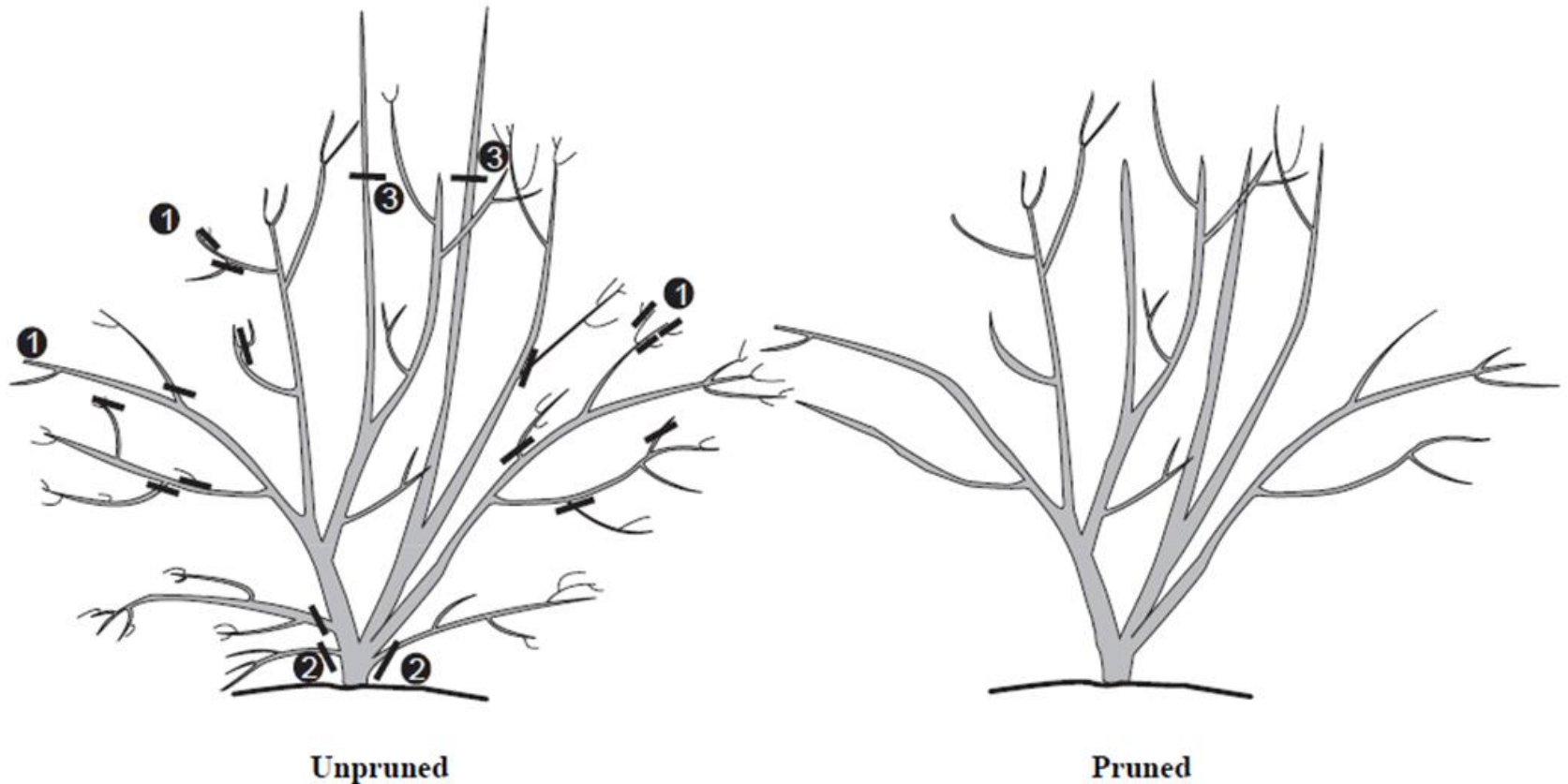


Diagram 3

Pruning the first 2 to 3 years:

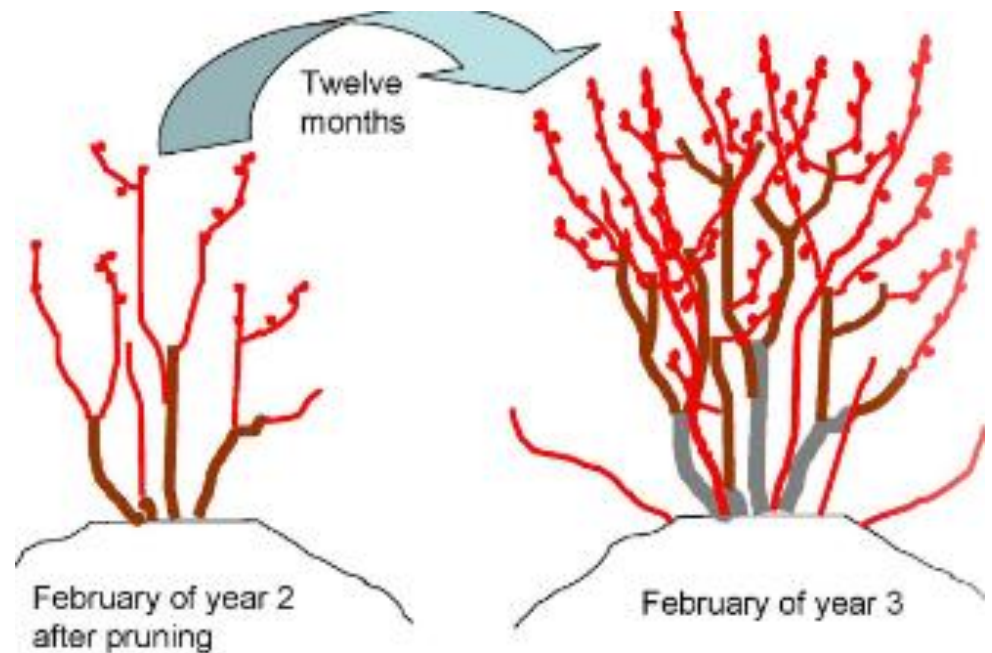
remove fruit buds (1)

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)

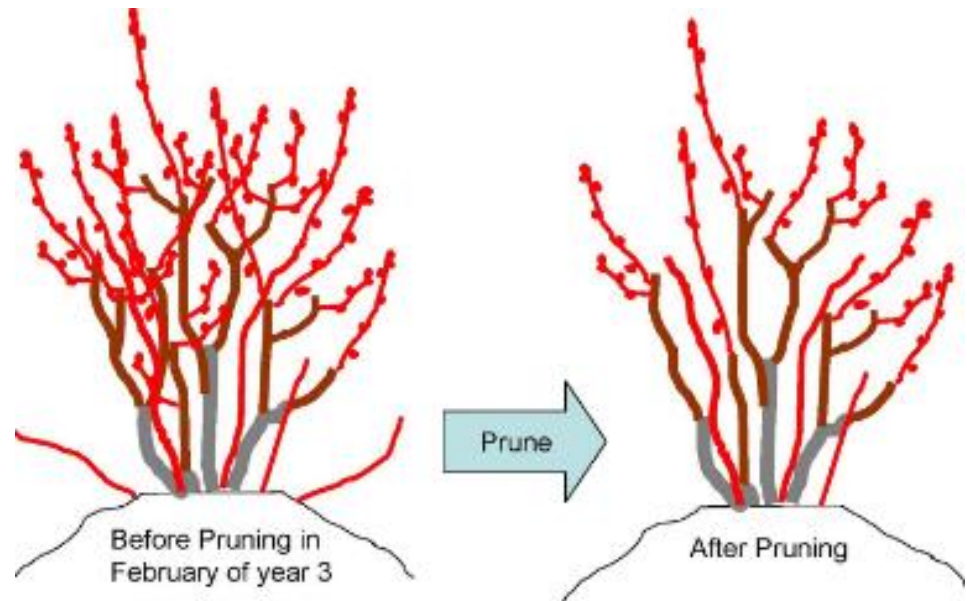
Pruning for First Crop

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



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



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)



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



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>



Resources

- Blueberry Pruning, University of Missouri Extension
 - http://extension.missouri.edu/blueberry/documents/Shared_Documents/MOBBSchool/MOBBSchoolWks/ByersBBPruning.pdf
- Growing Blueberries in Missouri, Missouri State University
 - <https://ag.missouristate.edu/assets/MtnGrv/B44GrowingBlueberries.pdf>
- Pruning Blueberries, NC State
 - <https://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pruning-Blueberries-25JAN14.pdf? fwd=no>
- Pruning Blueberry Bushes, The Ohio State University
 - <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/hyg-1430>
- Pruning Blueberries, University of Tennessee
 - <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP284-E.pdf>



Questions

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