Lost Branch Blueberry Farm

The Making of a Small Blueberry Farm
History of Our Farm

- Parents' farm in 70's & 80's
- Purchased by in-laws in late 80's
- 7 1/2 acres deeded to us in 1988
- Purchased additional 20 acres in 2000
- Land pretty much idle until Sept. 2004 (broke ground Fall 2004)
- Planted Zone 1 Spring '05
- Planted Zones 2&3 Spring '06
- Planted Zones 4&5 Fall '07
- Planted final zones 6&7 Spring '13
Sheep and Asparagus

- Purchased 10 Katahdin sheep 2007
- Purchased approximately 25 2008
- Currently approximately 85 ewes
  - Lambs sold at market
- Planted 350 asparagus crowns in 2010
  - 900 crowns in 2012
- Began asparagus sales in Spring 2013
Why Blueberries??

Life changing walk through the garden.
Blueberries - The Perfect Fruit?

- Taste good (most people like them)
- Easy to pick
- Easy to process (Bag and freeze)
- Very healthy:
  - Strong antioxidant
  - Anti-inflammatory
  - Good source of fiber and vitamin C
  - Good for urological health
- Small seeds
One minor consideration - Can they be grown *here in NEMO*?

Had not had success thus far....
The Preliminaries - Research

- Computer - articles and videos
  Be discerning - not all is correct or correct for your area
  Find the commonalities
- Talk to those with experience in your area or state.
  Small fruit specialists
  Booklet - "Growing Blueberries in Missouri"
- Visit other farms in area or state
Important Things to Consider

- Soil and lay of land
  Test soil pH!!
  Also test for nutrients (especially N, P, K)
  Clay, Sand, Clay loam (water holding capability?)
- Water source
- Decide what type of operation
  U-Pick
  Farm to Market
- Field/Farm layout
  Zones? (according to irrigation)
  Rows? Direction, length, drainage, slopes
Things to Consider cont....

- **Marketing:**
  - Web blog (Facebook as of 2013)
  - Most important marketing tool!
  - Used for updates during season
  - Flyers, business cards, local trader paper

- **Varieties - What grows best in your area**
  - Good success with several varieties
  - here in Northeast MO

- **Considerations - vigor, disease resistance, flavor, ease of pruning, clinging characteristics**
My Varieties

Earliblue - good
Duke - more sensitive to pH changes
Bluecrop - good
Blueray - very good
Bluejay - very good
Toro - fair
Draper - good
Polaris - not so good
Legacy and Patriot (new 2013)
Breaking Ground

- Assess supplies needed - find reliable economical source

Soil amendments:
- 1. Source for rotten sawdust and mulch
   local sawmill, tree trimmer
- 2. Pelletized sulfur - MFA (plant foods)
- 3. Sphagnum peat moss - can buy economically in large quantities - off season
Breaking Ground cont…

Irrigation:

- Contractor to build pond or well
- Pump and supplies - intake hose w/ foot valve, gauges, electrical supplies, etc…
- Piping - main line and sublines and parts, drainage tube
- Drip tubing and parts
Breaking Ground cont...

- Controller (if several zones)
- Equipment rental - ditcher, skid loader, etc...
- Where to purchase plants?
  - Order well in advance
  - Virus tested
  - Size - (2 yr old field ready)
- When to plant - Fall or Spring?
Measure out rows (10 - 12 ft)
Prefer up and down
Good circulation and drainage
May make a difference as to direction facing
Should be mounded up
Holes approximately 4 ft spacing about 1 foot deep and wide
Planting

- Soil should be stabilized at 4.5 - 5pH
- Irrigation in place - drip lines
- Have sphagnum moss moist & ready for amount of plants, 1.5 gal per plant; may want to mix into hole in Fall and let sit during the winter
- Try to plant new plants ASAP after arrival
- Don't plant too deeply!
My Irrigation System - Parts

- Pump - 1 hp Myers centrifugal
  - Location - Base of pond (centrifugal) or floating submerged
- Air tank
- Intake 30 ft 2" hose with foot valve
  - Check valve on suction side at pump
- Pressure regulator - on 20 off 40 psi
- Pressure gauge on pump
- 150 micron disk filter
- Ball valves
- Injector pump - fertigation/acidification
- Main line 1" poly tube
My Irrigation System-Parts cont...

- Electronic Valves - each zone
- Subline - each zone
- Drip Tube
- Air vent valves - on high end of pipes
- Drain/winterization valves
- Irrigation buckets (where valves are in the ground)
General Cost Breakdown

Irrigation (including one new pond) - $30,000
Soil prep and amendments - $8,000
Mulch - $8,000
Equipment rental $3,000
Plants - $5,000
Total = $54,000

Average income per year thus far $8,000
$8,000 x 5 years = $40,000
Projected income per year $30,000-$40,000 (2,400 plants)
Reality? Adjusted income = $25,000
Ongoing Considerations

- Disease control - Pruning, Fungicides
- Weed control - mulch, chemical
- Pest control - birds, raccoons, deer
  - Pirotechnics
  - Motion scare devices
  - Lethal permit
  - Distress sound unit
- Chemical Control - grape kool aid??
  - RejecX-it
O'Hare enlists grape flavoring to repel birds

November 11, 2004  |  By Jon Hilkevitch, Tribune transportation reporter.

Wildlife experts at O'Hare International Airport hope the grape flavoring used in Kool-Aid will encourage pesky birds that endanger planes to satisfy their appetites elsewhere.

Not far from steel traps baited with live pigeons to catch raptors on airport property and propane cannons used to scare away bird flocks, a series of hazing machines borders the 105-acre water retention pond known as Lake O'Hare.

FOR THE RECORD - This story contains corrected material, published Nov. 12, 2004.
Ongoing Considerations cont....

- Mulch
- Replacement plants
- Soil testing
- Pruning
- Irrigation repair
- fertilization/acidification
- Irrigation source quality control
  - Copper sulfate - pond
- Grounds keeping - mowing, etc...
First Planting Spring 2005
Where We Get Our Plants
Two Years Later
First Crop 2008
A Young Picking Customer 2009
Welcome to Lost Branch Blueberry Farm
Choose blue - for goodness' sake!