

Pruning Blueberries

General Notes About Blueberry Growth

Prune blueberries every year after the third year of growth. Prune in January to early March in Clark County, WA.

Try to have equal number of 1-to-6-year-old canes. At base of shrub, remove the oldest and unproductive canes, and thin the new growth (whips) to just a few. Shoot for 6-12 canes emerging from the ground.

The best berries form on 1-year-old wood (last year's growth) that is 8-12" long. Remove shorter (twiggy) 1-year-old wood as it will produce poor fruit and/or more vegetative growth.

Vegetative buds (lower on the 1-year-old wood) will produce next year's side shoots. Correct pruning provides a nice balance between fruit production and growth of vigorous new shoots.

Limit how many buds/flowers are on the shrub overall so as to get good size fruit. Severe pruning produces larger berries. Prune as much as 50–75% of the shrub each year.

On newly planted shrubs remove flowers so the plants develop a good root system before they fruit for the first time. Do this for a year or 2. *Patience!*

NOTE: Some blueberry cultivars don't produce many whips from base of plant. They produce from the base of older canes between ground and knee height. You will have fewer canes at the base of such a cultivar. Maintain the same balance of older and newer overall canes, but be aware that some canes originate not from the ground, but from existing canes.

Step-by-step Guide:

1. Remove dead, damaged, diseased wood.
2. Remove 1 or 2 old or unproductive canes at base of plant (close to ground). Unproductive canes are 4-year-old or older wood with small or weak growth (short lateral shoots).

3. Close to ground, remove whips smaller than pencil size. Leave larger whips to develop into fruiting wood next year. Leave 6-12 total canes.
4. Remove twiggy wood all around the plant allowing for good light penetration and air flow.
5. When plants overbear fruit, they produce very little new growth of wood. If this occurs, try removing some of the weakest (shortest and thinnest) 1-year-old wood. And if necessary, cut back some remaining 1-year-old wood by removing 1/3 of the flower buds.

Learning Aids

Videos Showing Technique

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm6ZfpGy5oQ>

Video from University of Maine. Prune only during dormant season—OUR dormant season. We want 6-12 canes that are 1-6 years old, and with a good selection of fruiting buds at the tips and vegetative buds below that. From the canes we have left, prune out lateral branches that are dead or old—old wood has thick peeling bark—opening the shrub for good light and air penetration.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2oOBbLI0fg>

Video from Penn State. Make cuts to remove canes as close to the ground as possible. Remove canes to open up center of plant. Remove smaller lateral branches heading toward center of plant. Remove smaller branches toward the center that have only flower buds. Want to balance fruiting and vegetative buds.

Blueberry Growing Guide PDF

- <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/sites/default/files/ec1304.pdf>

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