

Pruning Blueberries

General Notes About Blueberry Growth

After third year of growth, prune blueberries every year. Prune Jan to early Mar.

Remove flowers of newly planted shrubs so they get a well established root systems before they fruit the first time. Do this a year or 2. *Patience!*

Blueberries produce fruit on 1-year-old wood (last year's growth). Ensure there is plenty of new wood on the shrubs.

Try to have equal number of 1-, 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old canes. At base of shrub, remove the oldest, unproductive canes and thin the new growth (whips) to just a few. Strive for 6-12 canes emerging from the ground.

Limit how many flowers are on the shrubs, so as to get good size fruit. Severe pruning produces larger berries.

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.

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

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, unproductive canes at base of plant (close to ground). See note above.
Unproductive canes are 4-year or older wood with small or weak growth (short lateral shoots or 1-year-old wood).

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

Learning Aids

Videos Showing Technique

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osQB7jWeNvs>
This is 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&feature=related>
This is 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>
This is from Oregon State University Extension. It's always best to use or at least consult with LOCAL knowledge about every little thing you do in your garden.