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THE BLUEBERRY BULLETIN

A Weekly Update to Growers

Visit the Blueberry Bulletin webpage: njaes.rutgers.edu/blueberry-bulletin
2024 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey: njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs

Blueberry Culture

Dr. Gary C. Pavlis, Atlantic County Agricultural Agent

During visits to farms this week I was struck by the fact that a few fields that had been looking very weak a couple of years ago due to grub damage had come back very well due to the application of proper control. It brought home the need to observe problems in the field, get them diagnosed, and apply the recommended treatment as early as possible. Without early diagnosis the field slowly goes down, yield decreases, and money is lost. In the end a once productive field must be replanted at a considerable expense. I always feel good when a field that was on the brink of decline is brought back to being productive. It must be also mentioned that I saw a few fields with plants that have set fruit but no leaves.

Sometimes it is just a few canes on the plant, sometimes it is the entire plant. Either way, it spells trouble. I have written many columns in this newsletter about plants with no leaves. This is usually due to a root problem, most of the time due to grubs and sometimes due to root rot. Both can be reversed but it takes an observant eye in the field to notice the problem before it gets too advanced. This is the time of the year when we are most likely to see this problem and growers are advised to stay observant. If a plant has a full crop but does not have any leaves, the first thing that should be done is to strip the fruit off the plant. In this way, once the problem is solved the plant can recover. With a full crop load, it will probably die.

Gary C. Pavlis, Ph.D.
Atlantic County Agricultural Agent

Pest Management

Dr. Cesar Rodriguez-Saona, Extension Specialist in Blueberry Entomology, Rutgers University
Dr. Janine Spies, IPM Agent – Fruit
Ms. Carrie Mansue, IPM Sr. Program Coordinator – Fruit

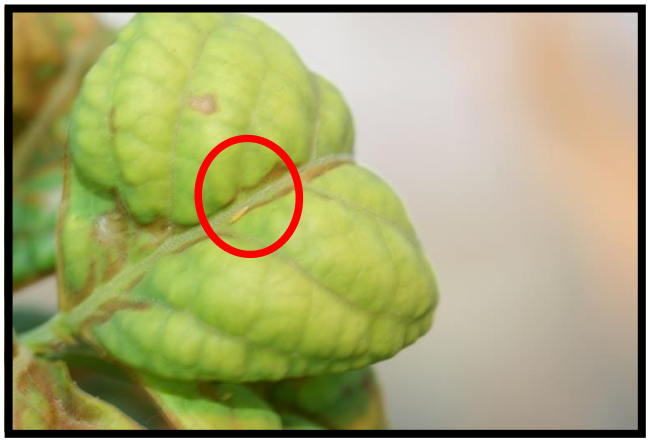
This past week, IPM scouting was conducted in both Burlington and Atlantic counties. A total of 45 fields were evaluated. We observed minimal activity of Lepidoptera pests including spongy moths, and plum curculio. However, thrips were detected in several fields. While most fields remained below threshold levels, the average thrips count was 7.18 per field, with a high of 141 in one field.

Thrips. Thrips are difficult to detect due to their small size (see Picture 1), and the injury they cause can resemble damage from nutrient deficiencies or diseases. To confirm that thrips are the causal agents of injury, inspect the affected areas directly for the presence of thrips—this can be done using a white beating tray.

Grower concerns typically center on potential thrips injury to blueberry flowers. This damage is usually caused by flower thrips in the genus *Frankliniella*. In New Jersey, the eastern flower thrips (*Frankliniella tritici*) is commonly found in and around blueberry fields. It can feed on flowers and pose a potential threat to the crop. This species can be monitored using white sticky traps.

After bloom, most thrips activity shifts to young blueberry foliage, where feeding causes leaf curling. This type of injury is primarily caused by another species, *Scirtothrips ruthveni*. It is still unknown whether foliar injury from thrips results in yield reductions. Thrips damage to fruit is typically minimal and becomes undetectable as the fruit matures.

We have collected data on thrips captures using white sticky traps and have developed a degree-day model to help predict thrips abundance in blueberry fields. The model is available here: https://benedick.sebs.rutgers.edu/BlueberryWeather/



Picture 1. Typical thrips injury to young blueberry foliage, characterized by curling of leaves. An adult thrips can be seen inside the red circle. Thrips are small, fast moving insects.

Scouting and Control: Thrips can be monitored using white sticky traps and beating trays. If an injury is observed, growers may apply Entrust (OMRI approved) or Delegate. These products are highly toxic to bees, so if used during bloom, they must be applied at dusk when bees are not actively foraging. We recommend avoiding insecticide applications during bloom unless absolutely necessary.

Week Ending	Leafroller		Spongy Moth		Plum Curculio		Thrips	
	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH
4/26/25	0.009	0.2	0.005	0.1	0.08	0.2	0	0
5/2/25	0.08	0.5	0.002	0.1	0.04	0.4	7.18	141

Terrapin Scale. Scale traps were checked, and no activity was detected.

Week Ending	Scale	
	AVG	HIGH
5/2/25	0	0

Cranberry Fruitworm and Cherry Fruitworm. At this time, activity was once again observed only in our cherry fruitworm traps, with moth trap counts increasing in both counties. While treatment may be warranted, it should be delayed until honey bees have been removed from the fields. No activity was observed in the cranberry fruitworm traps.

Week Ending	CBFW AC		CBFW BC		CFW AC		CFW BC	
	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH	AVG	HIGH
4/3/25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4/11/25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4/19/25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4/25/25	0	0	0	0	3.85	6	0.75	3
5/2/25	0	0	0	0	19.42	34	3.86	6
CBFW = Cranberry Fruitworm, CFW = Cherry Fruitworm; AC = Atlantic County, BC = Burlington County								

Pollination Update

Beth Ferguson, Postdoctoral Researcher

The bloom period this year has benefited from warm, sunny days which means bee activity has been high. For Duke plants, bloom has progressed to 90-95% and has moved past peak and is winding down, particularly in the more central locations. Bluecrop is not far behind at 65-80% and is peaking/moving past peak bloom. The cloudy and rainy weather this week means very little activity from honey bees, but as it warms back up next week there are some things to consider.

If you do not have a lot of mid-late or late season acreage (Draper, Elliott, etc.) your bees may not have enough forage to keep the hives stocked with honey and pollen. Hives in food shortage will be stressed and can experience higher amounts of robbing where adult foragers from one hive invade a neighboring hive to take food rather than collect food from plants in the field. Stressed hives are also more susceptible to disease and parasites and typically produce less brood. Abandonment of the hive (known as absconding) can also occur if there are not enough resources where the queen and workers empty out the food stores and leave to find a new home. This leaves no resources or brood to continue the colony. If your farm is mostly Duke and Bluecrop, you may want to let your beekeeper know that bloom has been shorter than normal so they can determine if additional food is needed to maintain healthy hives.

As we warm up again next week keep in mind that you might see 'bearding' at the front of the hives where adults gather on the outside as part of an effort to cool the inside. This is normal behavior and is more common at the hottest part of the day.

Image taken from Woodland Bee Co. Bearding behavior of honey bees at the hive entrance.