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THE BLUEBERRY BULLETIN

A Weekly Update to Growers

Visit the Blueberry Bulletin webpage: extension.rutgers.edu/blueberry-bulletin
2024 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey: njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs
Save the Date: Blueberry Twilight Meeting, Thursday, April 23rd, Whalen Farms, 6pm
Save the Date: Blueberry Twilight Meeting, Thursday, May 14th Research Center 6pm

Blueberry Culture

Dr. Gary C. Pavlis, Atlantic County Agricultural Agent

Visits to numerous farms this week have shown that bloom has started and even though the percent bloom varies between 5% and 80% as of April 15th, this should be the cue to all that the first application of fertilizer should be applied. Research has shown that application now is the most efficient use of fertilizer as the uptake by the blueberry plants is at maximum right now and will continue for the next six weeks. The blueberry plant has a very inefficient root system so research has also shown that if fertilizer applications are spread out over the next six weeks, it will result in the highest yield. The easiest method to do this of course is by the use of fertigation.

It is also not too late to adjust the pH if your fields require it. The addition of sulfur to lower the pH only happens once the soil temperature is above 55 degrees so again, now is the perfect time for application of sulfur. Soil samples taken by the IPM program have shown that most fields in Atlantic County require a lime application as the pH levels are lower than the optimum of 4.5 to 4.8. A lime application at this time is also recommended, however the increase in pH will occur more slowly than the lowering process so it is recommended to apply as soon as possible. It is important to note that a field outside the optimum pH will be less efficient in fertilizer uptake, which costs the grower money.

I have also been asked about the small brown holes growers are seeing in the blueberry blossom corolla's(see picture below). I was first shown this by Phil Marucci many years ago.

Phil told me that this phenomenon is done by carpenter bees and he called them nectar robbers. These bees do not do anything for pollination but usually do not hinder pollination either. In short, nothing to worry about.

Gary C. Parks, 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

Cranberry Weevil

Last week, we scouted 89 blueberry fields across Burlington and Atlantic counties. This marked our final week focusing exclusively on cranberry weevil. In the coming weeks, we will transition to monitoring plum curculio (PC), leafrollers, thrips, and Phomopsis.

Across the 89 fields sampled, the average density was 1.46 weevils per bush, with a maximum of 10.3 weevils per bush. Of the fields visited, at least two had weevil populations high enough to warrant treatment. For treatment options, please refer to the previous newsletter article or consult the 2024 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey.

Caution is strongly advised when considering treatment, as the crop is entering the bloom period. Some flowers are already open, and scouting has confirmed the presence of both native pollinators and managed honeybees in the field. Under these conditions, it is prudent to delay any insecticide applications and instead document cranberry weevil presence for management planning in the following season.

Monitor for Plum Curculio

This season, the IPM team has deployed plum curculio traps (Figure 1) to support early detection of this pest. The traps were installed last week and will be monitored regularly moving forward. Field scouting will continue as part of our standard program; however, the addition of trapping provides an enhanced monitoring tool to further strengthen our IPM efforts.

In addition, the Entomology Program at the P.E. Marucci Center is evaluating various baits for monitoring plum curculio adults. This collaborative project involves multiple institutions and a semiochemical-based company, with the goal of assessing the efficacy of plum curculio lures across different crops.

Figure 1. Plum curculio trap. Picture Taken by Carrie Mansue.