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THE BLUEBERRY BULLETIN

A Weekly Update to Growers



Visit the Blueberry Bulletin webpage: extension.rutgers.edu/blueberry-bulletin
2026 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey:
<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=E265>

Blueberry Culture

Dr. Gary C. Pavlis, Atlantic County Agricultural Agent

It has been some time since I discussed the use of mulch with highbush blueberries. The first question is why do we mulch blueberries? We mulch because we are trying to duplicate the natural soil conditions that exist where the highbush blueberry is native and thrives such as the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. Mulch has many benefits, not the least of which is increasing the organic matter of the soil. Mulching increases the soil's ability to hold water and nutrients and lowers root temperature in the summer. There was no need to mulch on most south Jersey blueberry farms years ago because the soil was the perfect pH for blueberries and the organic matter was high. It was rare to find a Jersey farm that mulched before the mid 90's. Today, most farms mulch their blueberries. Why the change? We must look at how we grow blueberries here. We use herbicides under the plants, and we rototill the middles to control the weeds which

are practices that are very effective, but the lack of weeds does not allow organic matter to accumulate and rototilling burns up the natural organic matter. In addition, we routinely use a 10-10-10 fertilizer which usually contains nitrogen in the form of ammonium sulfate. The ammonium slowly drives the pH down, out of the optimum range for blueberries. With decades of these practices, we now have to add lime to get the pH up and we have to mulch to replace the organic matter.

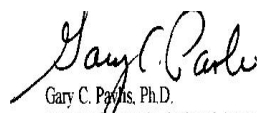
DISADVANTAGES:

Growers should realize that there are also a few disadvantages to applying mulch. Many growers experience rodent problems under the blueberry plants when mulch is used because of the perfect environment created by the mulch for these animals. In addition, mulch creates the perfect environment for the grub larva of Japanese, Oriental, and Asiatic beetles.



These larvae can be very destructive to blueberries, and many plantings have been damaged by these insects. Mulch can also be expensive to purchase and also to apply. Lastly, I am often asked what kind of mulch is best for blueberries. I always answer, “Whatever material the grower can get for free.” Often a grower can work with a local township to receive deliveries of wood chips from their utility’s authority. Realize however that no matter what mulch is used, it is going to affect nutrient availability because the breakdown process ties up nitrogen.

As a result, a higher application rate of nitrogen will be required and could be as high as double the rate without mulch. It is not possible to make a recommendation as to what the additional application should be because every mulch is different and breakdown varies with soil type, temperature, micro-organism activity, etc. Nitrogen levels in the plants should be monitored with yearly leaf analysis to determine how the mulch has affected nitrogen levels in the plant.


Gary C. Payis, 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

Insects

Trap monitoring moving forward will focus only on sharp-nosed leafhopper and scale, as these are currently the only pests that pose a potential economic threat to blueberry plants. Sharp-nosed leafhopper counts remain low based on our monitoring data (Table 1); however, scale activity has increased in some areas (Table 2). If you noticed scale markings on your fruit during harvest, you may want to consider treatment to help reduce populations for next season.

Trap Monitoring

Table 1. Sharp-nosed Leafhopper Traps

	Sharp-nosed Leafhopper			
	Atlantic County		Burlington County	
	Avg	High	Avg	High
6/6	1.42	16	1.25	7
6/12	0.56	12	4.8	46
6/20	0.88	6	1.44	12
6/27	0.77	9	0.37	2
7/3	1.5	15	0.55	2



7/10	1.40	14	0.33	2
7/18	0.98	13	0	0
7/25	1.11	7	0.11	1
7/31	0.90	5	0.25	2
8/8	0.85	18	0.3	2
8/14	0.9	9	1	7
8/21	0.59	5	0.6	5

Table 2. Scale Traps

	Putnam Scale		Terrapin Scale	
	Avg	High	Avg	High
5/23	36.85	230	1.8	8
5/29	65.17	352	21.2	41
6/6	136.25	402	75.25	84
6/12	164	639	96	202
6/20	102	288	85	167
6/27	45	193	32	119
7/3	41.7	315	27.5	46
7/10	16.26	74	24.6	61
7/18	6.06	25	12	24
7/25	10.5	73	11	24
7/31	12.6	64	11.3	27
8/8	20.8	135	15.3	32
8/14	40.58	146	31.42	109
8/21	36	246	40	61