

Extension Notes

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

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Harvesting Blueberries and Blackberries for Full Flavor

It's almost prime harvest season for blueberries and blackberries, both of which have the potential to grow very well in Kentucky. Blueberries, which are native to North America, are ready to harvest from early June through early August. Blackberries are ready to harvest from mid-June to early October. These delicious fruits offer health benefits, but best of all, they capture the essence of summer in their sweetness.

Blueberries can be excellent choices for both home and commercial growing. They have the advantage of being as long-lived as fruit trees, with few pests or diseases. They also have a late blossom time, so frost rarely causes damage on well-chosen sites. Blackberries also have a long fruit-bearing life and will produce for a decade or longer in Kentucky.

Blueberries require an acidic soil, which means that most soils in Kentucky will need to be amended to properly suit their needs. They also require a high organic material content, so peat moss should be mixed with the soil at the time of planting. Do not substitute with other materials. Irrigation is necessary during the summer because blueberries have a shallow, limited root system. Insufficient irrigation can compromise both this year's and next year's crops.

Blackberries need to be pruned, fertilized and irrigated. Pruning varies, depending on the type of bramble; for specific information on the proper pruning for your blackberry canes, see the University of Kentucky's publication, "Growing Blackberries and Raspberries in Kentucky." It's available online at <https://tinyurl.com/528nwxkv> or by contacting your local office of the UK Cooperative Extension Service.

Blueberries in a cluster do not ripen at the same time, and only fully ripe berries should be picked. Fruit need at least one to two days after turning blue to develop full flavor and can be left on the bush for up to 10 days without a loss in size. Flavor does not improve once the fruit is picked; consequently, blueberries should be left on the bush for as long as possible to develop sweetness and flavor.

For best results at harvest, pick carefully, rolling blueberries from the cluster with the thumb into the palm of the hand. Handle as little as possible to avoid rubbing off the bloom (the light waxy finish on the skin) and reduce bruising. Harvest only when berries are dry. Refrigerate promptly to slow ripening and decay.

Blackberries picked for commercial sale are picked "firm ripe," but home growers have the luxury of picking soft, fully ripe and juicy fruit. Pick fruit twice a week, and during hot, rainy weeks, every other day. Harvest after the morning dew has dried. Pick carefully to avoid bruising the fruit, and, as with blueberries, refrigerate quickly to limit fruit rot. The sweetest, best tasting fruit is produced during dry, sunny weather when nights are cooler.

For more information, see UK's publications on growing blueberries available online at <https://tinyurl.com/mr4ya994> or contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion,

political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

Upcoming Events:

- **Senior Farmer's Market Vouchers** – Seniors interested in receiving Farmer's Market vouchers this year should call 474-6686 between 8:30-4:00 on June 6th & 7th to schedule an appointment to pick up their Farmer's Market voucher card.
- **Ag Advancement Council** – June 9th @ 6:00 PM