Blueberry Variety Releases from

The University of Georgia

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The University of Georgia Blueberry Breeding Program is aggressively developing new cultivars for use by commercial growers, small pick-your-own operations and home gardeners. Our goal is to provide well adapted plants with high quality fruit for the Southeastern U.S. and other regions with similar climates. The program has been in existence for several decades, and this long term effort has led to great improvement of the plant material that is available. Many blueberry varieties on the market today are older selections, however, in the past few years newer varieties with superior performance have been developed. New releases include both rabbiteye blueberry and southern highbush blueberry varieties. The following is a brief description (with photos) of new blueberry varieties that have been released by Dr. Scott NeSmith since he has taken over the UGA Blueberry Breeding Program in 1998. Varieties are presented in relative order of their release, from oldest to most recent.

Please note the new blueberry releases from UGA are protected varieties and require a license to propagate. Propagation rights are controlled by University of Georgia Research Foundation, Technology Commercialization Office, GSRC Boyd Bldg, Athens, Ga. 30602-7411. (www.ovpr.uga.edu/tco/).

Alapaha Rabbiteye Blueberry

Alapaha (uh-la-puh-HAH), named for the Alapaha River in south Georgia, was released in 2001 as an early season rabbiteye blueberry. Plants of Alapaha are vigorous and upright with narrow crowns. The variety flowers relatively late (7 to 10 days after the older variety Climax), which helps avoidance of spring freeze damage; yet, fruit of Alapaha ripens quickly, beginning about the same time as fruit ripening of Climax. Alapaha berries are medium in size, which is ideal for both fresh and frozen packs. Fruit have good firmness and flavor. Berry color is good, although the fruit are medium dark blue, and they have a small dry scar, which contributes to good shelf life. Chilling requirement for Alapaha is estimated to be 450 to 500 hours < 45 F (7 C). The variety has proven to be suitable for mechanical harvesting and it has demonstrated improved resistance to rain cracking. Alapaha is recommended for areas where rabbiteye blueberries are grown successfully as an early ripening variety to replace Climax. Alapaha has shown some self fruitfulness, but it should be planted with other rabbiteye blueberries with a similar time of bloom for cross pollination. Recommended companion variety is Vernon. USPP 16,266.

Figure 1. Alapaha plants at bloom time.

Figure 2. Alapaha rabbiteye blueberry fruit during ripening.

Figure 3. Ripe berries of the early season rabbiteye blueberry variety Alapaha.

Ochlockonee Rabbiteye Blueberry

'Ochlockonee'(ok-LAHK-uh-nee), named after the Ochlockonee River in south Georgia, is a late season rabbiteye blueberry that was released in 2002. Plants of Ochlockonee are vigorous, upright and have moderately narrow crowns. They produce abundant fruiting stems annually with only moderate growth. Ochlockonee is very productive in yield, substantially exceeding Tifblue, a widely grown older standard variety. Berries of Ochlockonee ripen about one week after Tifblue, and are larger in size. Other important fruit characters (stem scar, color, firmness, and flavor) of Ochlockonee are good, being similar to Tifblue and Powderblue. Plants of Ochlockonee generally flower late enough to escape spring freezes in south and middle Georgia. It is recommended that both large commercial and smaller growers desiring a late ripening rabbiteye blueberry try Ochlockonee in areas where rabbiteye blueberries are successfully grown. The estimated chill requirement of the variety is 650 to 700 hours < 45 F (7 C). Ochlockonee has proven to be suitable for mechanical harvesting. The variety should be planted with other rabbiteye blueberries for cross pollination, and Powderblue is a recommended companion variety. USPP 17,300.

Figure 4. Ochlockonee rabbiteye blueberry plants during bloom time.

Figure 5. Ochlockonee rabbiteye blueberry plants as fruit beginning to ripen.

Figure 6. Ripe berries of Ochlockonee rabbiteye blueberry.

Palmetto Southern Highbush Blueberry

Palmetto, released in 2003, is an early ripening southern highbush blueberry. The most prominent feature of Palmetto is its outstanding flavor. The variety flowers and ripens around the time of Star in south and middle Georgia. In original south Georgia trials, Palmetto ripened more than 75% of its fruit during the first 2 weeks of May on average over a 5 year period. Palmetto has an acceptable berry scar and berry firmness, although the scar can become wet and berries will soften if they hang too long on the plant ripe. Fruit are medium size with medium dark blue color. A great feature of Palmetto is its good plant vigor, which would make this a very suitable home garden variety for those desiring highly flavorful berries. Commerical production of Palmetto may be limited to production scenarios where fruit flavor is desired and harvests are made frequently. A recommended companion variety for cross pollination is Suziblue. Chill hour requirement of Palmetto is estimated to be 400 to 450 hours < 45 F (7 C). USPP 16,756.

Figure 7. Palmetto southern highbush blueberry flowers during bloom.

Figure 8. Palmetto southern highbush blueberry fruit during ripening.

Vernon Rabbiteye Blueberry

Vernon is an early season rabbiteye blueberry released in 2004. The variety has good yields and excellent plant vigor. Although plants of Vernon often flower 7 days after Climax in south Georgia, they can flower earlier than desired in some years when temperatures warm up quickly. However, Vernon fruit ripens early for a rabbiteye, usually several days ahead of Climax and Premier. Berries of Vernon are large and have excellent firmness. Color and flavor are good, and dry scars contribute to good shelf life. Both flavor and berry size improve as fruit hang ripe for an extra few days. Vernon is recommended where rabbiteye blueberries are grown successfully as an early ripening cultivar to replace Climax and/or Premier. The estimated chill requirement of the variety is 450 hours < 45 F (7 C). Vernon has shown to be suitable for mechanical harvesting. Care should be used in fertilizing Vernon, as over fertilization (especially nitrogen) can promote excess vegetative vigor which does not readily contribute to yield. The variety should be planted with other rabbiteye blueberries for cross pollination. Alapaha is a recommended companion variety. USPP 18,291.

Figure 9. Vernon rabbiteye blueberry at bloom time.

Figure 10. Vernon rabbiteye blueberry plants during ripening.

Figure 11. Ripe berries of the rabbiteye blueberry variety Vernon (upper photo). The lower photo shows Vernon (T-584) berries compared to the older variety Premier.

Camellia Southern Highbush Blueberry

Camellia, released in 2005, is a mid-season southern highbush blueberry that has highly attractive berries, especially with regards to color and size. Plants are very vigorous, have narrow crowns, and have strong upright cane growth. The variety has proven to be adaptable across a wide range of growing conditions. Camellia flowers and ripens 5 to 9 days after Star in south Georgia. Berries are large (up to 2.5 g and greater), firm, and flavorful. Commercial growers desiring a high quality, mid-season blueberry that takes them up to early rabbiteye ripening time should consider Camellia in areas where southern highbush are successfully grown. Camellia should also be a good choice for pick-your-own growers that want a southern highbush since flowering is a little later than most southern highbush, and ripening period is somewhat extended over time. Care should be taken to not over fertilize Camellia, as it can grow excessively. Recommended companion variety for cross pollination is Suziblue for commercial growers and Palmetto for home gardens. The estimated chill requirement for Camellia is 500 hours < 45 F (7 C). USPP 18,151.

Figure 12. Camellia southern highbush blueberry during bloom.

Figure 13. Camellia southern highbush blueberry fruit during ripening.

Rebel Southern Highbush Blueberry

Rebel is an early season southern highbush blueberry released in 2006. Plants of Rebel are very vigorous and precocious with a slightly spreading growth habit. The variety produces abundant fruiting wood annually and leafs well following the mild winters of south Georgia. Rebel is productive in yield, exceeding yields of the varieties Star and O'Neal in original trials in south Georgia. Berries of Rebel ripen 5 to 8 days ahead Star, while Rebel flowering dates only average about 3 to 5 days earlier than Star. Rebel fruit are large, reaching 2.5 g/berry or more under good management, which includes good fertility practices and annual pruning. Other important fruit characteristics, including stem scar, color, and firmness are good to excellent for Rebel. Rebel flavor can be bland if ripe berries hang too long on the plant. Growers desiring an early ripening southern highbush should consider Rebel in areas where southern highbush are successfully grown. The estimated chill requirement is 400-450 hours < 45 F (7 C). Recommended companion variety for cross pollination is Suziblue. USPP 18,138.

Figure 14. Rebel southern highbush blueberry during bloom.

Figure 15. Rebel plants at the beginning of fruit ripening.

Figure 16. Rebel southern highbush fruit during ripening.

Blue Suede™ Southern Highbush Blueberry for the Home Gardener

The southern highbush blueberry variety Blue Suede™ was released in 2008 for the home gardener market. The new variety ripens early compared to rabbiteye varieties generally available to homeowners in the Southeast through large commercial gardening outlets. Blue Suede™ produces an abundance of attractive, light blue fruit, and berries are generally large and flavorful. The plant of Blue Suede™ has nice ornamental appeal as well, with glamorous flowers in the spring, and notable fall coloring of leaves. A patent for the new variety has been obtained under the selection number TH-682. The variety is exclusively licensed to McCorkle Nursery, and is marketed under the trade name Blue Suede™, which is part of their Gardener's Confidence® Collection (www.GardenersConfidence.com). Plants are self fertile, but improved fruit set and berry size are usually obtained with cross pollination. Camellia and Palmetto would be recommended companion varieties. Home gardeners desiring a blueberry with ornamental value offering multiple season appeal should consider Blue Suede™. The variety is estimated to have a chilling requirement of 500 to 550 hours < 45 F (7 C), and will likely perform well in USDA hardiness zones 6b thru 9a. USPP 21,222.

Figure 17. Blue Suede™ during flowering.

Figure 18. Blue Suede™ bush with very light blue fruit.

Figure 19. Blue Suede™ close-up of fruit.

Figure 20. Blue Suede™ Fall color development.

Suziblue Southern Highbush Blueberry

The southern highbush blueberry variety named Suziblue was released in 2009 as a main season variety. It is early ripening, with large fruit (2.2 to 2.8 grams per berry) having medium light blue color, and a small, dry picking scar. Suziblue berry firmness is very good and it has good flavor. The new variety flowers and ripens with Star in south and middle Georgia, although, berry size and firmness have been better than the variety Star in test trials. Suziblue plants are vigorous, precocious and have a semi-spreading bush habit with a medium crown. Yield has been similar to or greater than Star in south Georgia. Leafing has been very good, even following mild winters. Plants can hold older leaves through the winter in south Georgia. Suziblue has performed very well in trials in both south and middle Georgia, and test plots in California have shown it to be very productive there as well. Suziblue is suggested as a main season southern highbush variety where firm, large fruit is desired. It may be a candidate for machine harvesting as berries generally hold firmness well. However, Suziblue's tight clusters likely require hand harvesting during first harvests. Suziblue has an estimated chill requirement of 400 or less hours < 45 F (7 C). Plants of Suziblue are self-fertile, but it is recommended to use a companion variety to enhance pollination and berry size. Rebel is suggested as a companion. USPP 21,167.

Figure 21. Suziblue plants during flowering in a high density bark bed.

Figure 22. Suziblue berries during ripening.

Figure 23. Suziblue during early ripening in the 2nd growing season.

Southern Splendour Southern Highbush Blueberry

A southern highbush blueberry variety named Southern Splendour was released in 2010. It is an early season variety with very firm, crisp berries that have outstanding flavor. Fruit are medium to medium-large in size (1.5 to 1.9 grams per berry), with medium light blue color, and small, dry picking scars. Southern Splendour has a short fruit development period, flowering several days after Star and Rebel in south Georgia, but ripening with them. Plants are vigorous and have a semi-upright bush habit with a narrow crown. Yield has been only medium for Southern Splendour, but its excellent berry firmness and ease of berry detachment make it a possible candidate for machine harvesting for fresh and process markets. Southern Splendour has an estimated chill requirement of 450 to 500 hours < 45 F (7 C). Plants are self-fertile, but it is recommended they be planted with other southern highbush blueberry cultivars with a similar time of flowering for cross-pollination (Suziblue suggested). Southern Splendour is new, so planting on a trial basis is recommended. USPP 22,692.

Figure 24. Flowers of Southern Splendour being pollinated.

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Figure 25. Southern Splendour berries during ripening.

Figure 26. Plants of 3-year old Southern Splendour grown near Waycross, Ga.

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Summer Sunset™ Edible Ornamental Blueberry

The blueberry hybrid Summer Sunset™ was released in 2010 for the edible ornamental market. The new variety ripens with early rabbiteye blueberry varieties Alapaha, Climax, and Premier in the Southeastern U.S. Summer Sunset's™ novel appeal is the presence of an array of multi-colored berries as the fruit goes through stages of ripening. Berries are generally medium size, and progress in color (based on Royal Horticultural Society's Color Chart) from RHS Yellow-Green 145 C, to RHS Orange-Red 34 C and N34 C, to RHS Red 47 C, to RHS Red-Purple 59 C, to RHS Black 202 A when fully ripe. Fruit are slightly tart when first ripe, and gradually get sweeter as they hang. The plant of Summer Sunset is vigorous, reaching a height of 4 ft with a canopy width of more than 2.5 ft on 3-year old plants. There is growing interest in edible ornamentals by both the home garden and landscape industry. Consumers are increasingly attracted to edible plants that offer aesthetic appeal while providing them with the opportunity for garden fresh produce from their own outdoor living space. Summer Sunset™ provides a blueberry with ornamental appeal that may well satisfy such consumers. The new variety is estimated to have a chilling requirement of 500 to 550 hours < 45 F (7 C), and will likely perform well in USDA hardiness zones 6b thru 9a. Companion varieties for cross pollination are recommended. Suggestions are Titan and Pink Lemonade. USPP applied for.

Figure 27. Summer Sunset during flowering.

Figure 28. Three year old plants Summer Sunset during fruiting in south Georgia (upper photo) and middle Georgia (lower photo).

Figure 29. Close-up views of Summer Sunset fruit during ripening.

Titan™ Rabbiteye Blueberry

Titan™ is a large fruited rabbiteye blueberry released in 2010. The variety has very high yields and excellent plant vigor. Berries are very large, often exceeding 3 g/berry, which is larger than any rabbiteye released to date. Fruit are also very firm, and hang well on the plant when ripe. The ability to hang well allows for even greater berry sizes to be achieved as berry size continues to increase after fruit turn blue. Titan™ berry color and flavor are good, and dry scars contribute to good shelf life. Titan™ generally ripens with Vernon and Premier, but has berry size larger than both of these. Plants are upright, and crowns are narrow. Plants have responded well to pruning and hedging, reinvigorating easily with new healthy fruiting wood. The new variety should be suitable for machine harvesting. Titan™ is recommended where rabbiteye blueberries are grown successfully as a commercial, homeowner, and pick-your-own variety. The estimated chill requirement of the variety is 500 to 550 hours < 45 F (7 C). It should be noted that Titan™ can have significant fruit cracking under wet conditions during ripening. The variety should be planted with other rabbiteye blueberries for cross pollination. Vernon is a recommended companion variety. USPP applied for.

Figure 30. Plants of Titan™ during flowering

Figure 31. Titan^{TM} fruit on 3rd leaf plants during ripening.

Figure 32. Titan™ fruit (T-959) size compared to Premier (upper photo). Titan™ fruit covering a US quarter (lower photo).

Georgia Dawn™ Southern Highbush Blueberry

A very early ripening southern highbush, Georgia Dawn™, was released in 2011. The new variety ripens 7 to 12 days before the early varieties Rebel and Star in south Georgia. Georgia Dawn™ also flowers very early (similar to Emerald) and should be grown with frost protection measures for more reliable production. However, the early ripening of Georgia Dawn™ should offer growers a chance for higher market prices, thus, a "reward" for the "risk". Georgia Dawn™ has medium to large berries with good flavor, scar and firmness. The new variety also has good plant vigor, with an upright growth habit and narrow crown. It's plausible Georgia Dawn™ could be suitable for mechanical harvest. The new variety is estimated to have a chilling requirement of 300 to 400 or less hours < 45 F (7 C). Growers seeking a very early blueberry variety they are willing to frost protect, should consider trialing Georgia Dawn™. The variety is self fertile but a companion variety would be good for pollination. Rebel is suggested. USPP applied for.

Figure 33. Georgia Dawn™ during flowering.

Figure 34. Georgia Dawn™ fruit during ripening.