Open furrows, twice, 0.3 hour each
(Tractor and driver)
Apply peat moss, once, 2.0 hours
(Tractor, trailer, and driver)
Fertilize, 5 times
Set blueberry plants, 5.0 hours
(Tractor, trailer, and driver)
Mulch beds, 5.0 hours
(Tractor, trailer, and driver)
Irrigation electricity

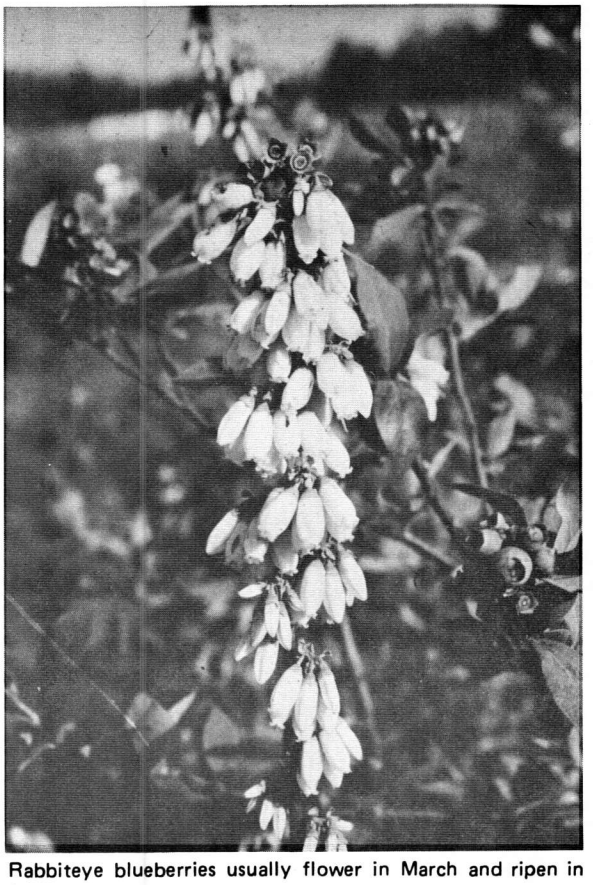
Inputs per year, years 2 and 3
Fertilize, 5 times
Spray 5 times, 0.5 hour each
Tractor, sprayer, and driver)
(Herbicides & Fungicide as recommended)
Mowing, 10 times, 0.4 hour each
(Tractor, mower and driver)
Pruning and hoeing, 20 hours
Irrigation electricity
Interest on establishment and pre-harvest costs

Harvesting and Marketing
Picking labor
Labor benefits
Containers
Market preparation (including marketing and advertising)
Transportation
Supervision

Site Selection

Climate, soil, and market considerations are important in site selection. The rabbiteye blueberry is deciduous and requires some cold weather each winter to induce strong flowering and good fruit set the following spring. North of Ocala, chilling is usually sufficient for good yields. Between Ocala and the northern edge of Lake Okeechobee, lack of chilling makes the feasibility of large rabbiteye blueberry plantations uncertain, and south of Okeechobee City, large blueberry plantations should not be made without extensive preliminary trials. We expect that part of the region between Ocala and Lake Okeechobee will become suitable for large-scale blueberry culture as new cultivars are developed and more information is accumulated on how blueberries react to marginally insufficient chilling. In the meantime, only small, experimental plantations should be considered for this area.

A problem with growing blueberries on the central Florida peninsula is that the colder valley locations, which would seem best suited for blueberry production because they provide the most chilling and are not used for citrus, are notorious frost pockets. By sunrise following still nights, temperatures may be 15°F colder in frost pockets than on surrounding hills. Blueberries are far less prone to crop loss from spring frost than are peaches and apples. Nonetheless, frost pockets should not be used for blueberry plantations anywhere in the state.



Rabbiteye blueberries usually flower in March and ripen in June.

One factor that favors central Florida as a blueberry production area is season of ripening. In the fresh fruit market, the earliest blueberries that ripen in Florida will receive the best markets and the highest prices. This will become increasingly true in the future, as rabbiteye production expands in Georgia and other southeastern states. Lower yields on currently available cultivars for central Florida may be offset by higher prices, but it will probably be years before experience shows whether central Florida will come out ahead or behind of northern Florida in this trade-off. Meanwhile, research is continuing on the breeding of cultivars to overcome the low chilling problem. Carefully planned blueberry you-pick farms located near central Florida population centers do seem to be feasible, albeit somewhat risky ventures at present, a primary risk being possible low yields following mild winters.