



If left unpruned, a rabbiteye blueberry bush will eventually reach a height of 4 to 7 meters.

and these flowered tips should be pruned off at or before the time of flowering. Alternately, the flowers could be picked off by hand.

Except for flower removal, no pruning is necessary until the plants get too large for easy fruit harvest. Detailed pruning will promote the highest yields and greatest plant vigor but requires more time than most growers consider practical. This involves removal of dead or damaged wood, removal of weak, twiggy growth, and selective removal of older canes to promote bush renewal. Growers have tested various other pruning systems that give acceptable results. These range from sawing the plant back to a height of 1 foot with a chain saw every 5 years to removal of 1 year's growth with a hedger. The best time to prune bearing plants is shortly after the fruit has been picked. This gives the plant time to grow new fruiting twigs that will produce fruit the following year.

Diseases and Insects

The established highbush blueberry industries in other parts of the country are afflicted by many diseases and insects. Currently, blueberry disease problems in Florida are being controlled primarily through resistant cultivars, use of disease-free plants for planting and by avoiding wet soils as planting sites. Disease and insect problems can be expected

to increase as the Florida blueberry industry gets older and larger. Insecticides should never be used on blueberries or any other crop until they are absolutely essential to prevent serious damage. Overuse of insecticides kills insect predators, many of which are other insects, and sets into motion a vicious cycle in which more and more sprays are necessary to control insects that were previously controlled by natural predators. If insects appear to be a problem, consult a county agent before spraying.

Birds

Birds can be a problem in blueberries. This is particularly true with small plantings in urban areas. Bird damage can be prevented by covering individual plants or entire plantings with nylon or plastic nets. Various noise-making devices have been tested with only limited effectiveness. A chemical bird repellent (Mesurol), which deters but apparently does not injure birds, has been tested by some growers and has been cleared for use in Michigan.

Rabbiteye Cultivars

The blueberry cultivars discussed in this section all produce high-quality berries that are essentially indistinguishable in the marketplace. Although av-