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Aliceblue and Beckyblue Blueberries

P. M. LYRENE AND W. B. SHERMAN[1]

Aliceblue and Beckyblue are two new rabbiteye blueberry cultivars recently released by the Fruit Crops Department of the University of Florida. The only rabbiteye blueberry cultivar previously introduced by the University of Florida was Bluegem in 1970. Aliceblue and Beckyblue resemble each other in chilling requirement, both requiring less chilling than any other rabbiteye cultivars available. As a consequence, they can be grown farther south, and in most years should fruit well as far south as the line between Daytona Beach and Tampa in Central Florida. On the other hand, low chilling in blueberries is associated with early flowering, and Aliceblue and Beckyblue probably would not be reliable producers north of Florida because of their tendency to flower while the frost hazard in those regions is still high.

Aliceblue and Beckyblue are not self fertile, and should be planted together for cross pollination. In Gainesville, they bloom in late February to early March, about a week before 'Bluegem'. Both show some resistance to powdery mildew, a disease that attacks most rabbiteye blueberries but has not been shown to seriously reduce yields. Annual yields from 5 to 6-year-old irrigated plants have been about 10 kg per plant. The fruit of Aliceblue and Beckyblue ripens before that of other rabbiteye cultivars, in late May or early June in Gainesville. Berries are firm, round, flavorful, and medium blue. The scars left where the berries separate from the stem during picking are small and dry. Berries of Aliceblue, which are about equal in size to those of 'Woodard', are slightly larger than those of Beckyblue, which resemble berries of Bluegem in size. Aliceblue and Beckyblue should be most valuable in the southern part of the rabbiteye blueberry production area. Growers outside of Florida should initially consider only small experimental plantings of the two cultivars. Plants were released to Florida blueberry nurserymen in the Winter 1977-78 and some rooted cuttings will be available to the public next Winter.

[1]Fruit Crops Dept., University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611.