

Mummy Berry Control in Blueberries

By Forrest Connelly

Last growing season I think you all remember the great rains we had. So how in the world did it seem like the blueberries were withering on the bush? Some may believe it was drought at the wrong time or possibly water logged roots which would give the same effect as drought.

Actually if your blueberries did not do well last year, you were not alone. Many homeowner and small farm producers witnessed the crop shrivel up, turn dark and fall to the ground. What was happening is what we call "mummy berry." What: Mummy berry is caused by a fungus, and is one of the most important blueberry diseases in our state. If left untreated, mummy berry can reduce yields by 30-40%. Early control and detection is necessary to reduce the impact of this disease.

What happens is that the berries that shrivel up and fall to the ground under the bush re-infect your bush the next year and things get progressively worse. They form a tiny mushroom that comes out early spring, the spores blow up to the leaves, the rain splashes the spores from the leaves to the flowers and the fruit is re-infected. Our friend the honey bee also spreads the spores while pollinating the bushes. You really do not know the berries are infected until they are formed. The berries shrivel and turn pinkish and get a hard grayish white center. They fall to the ground and start all over again next year.

But there is hope. Once you break the cycle you can suppress the disease. The key to it is if you see a few damaged berries this year, make sure you use some control strategies. Each year if untreated the % damaged gets worse.

The best time to achieve control of this disease is during the primary infection phase. Rake or disk soil beneath the blueberry bushes or cover the fallen mummy berries with a 3-4 inch mulch layer before tiny mushrooms appear in the spring. For the homeowner apply 3 pounds per hundred foot of row of 50% Urea. This will help burn out the tiny mushrooms. Fungicides are also effective but must be applied 4 times on 7-10 day intervals beginning at green tip or first sign of bloom, whichever comes first.

For secondary infection control, make applications beginning at bloom on the same type spray schedule. Different fungicides are required to control primary vs. secondary infections. My recommendation would be to mulch and use urea.

Also we will be having a fish pond meeting at our office on February 25 at 6pm. Also on March 27 at 6 pm we will be having a Bee Keeper Update. This training will be suitable for the beginner up to the expert bee keeper. If you have any questions or need additional information you may reach me at the Stephens County Extension office at 706-779-5501 or forrestc@uga.edu.