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- Donna Marshall

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Greetings and Salutations

Welcome to the first issue of the Mississippi *Vaccinium* Journal. I plan this as a way to relate items of interest to Mississippi Blueberry Growers in an organized and reader-friendly way. When certain topics require more frequent, or timely, communication I plan to post those things on my blog site and Twitter account (see page 2 for more details). In this introductory issue, I give you a short account of my background and also my contact information. Donna Marshall provided the chilling hour report for 2012 and compares it to 2011. Photos are worth a thousand words (or so the saying goes), so I include a couple of the freeze damage some blueberry blooms experienced earlier a few weeks ago. I also remind you all about the upcoming field day occurring later on this year. It is a good thing to keep in mind and be sure to tell anyone interested in growing blueberries about it.

I hope this new way of communicating proves to be informative and something you enjoy reading. I encourage you to tell me what you like and don't like about it so that it can keep improving and grow into a publication you find useful. I look forward to working with you in the future and am glad to be in Mississippi.

Dr. Eric T. Stafne

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See Page 4 for more information.



New Digital Information Sources Available

Eric T. Stafne

In addition to this new newsletter, I have started a blog where I will post interesting tidbits related to fruit crops. Even though the blog is not specific to blueberries, there will be lots of good information there. Whenever I have good blueberry info to post I will put it there. The big advantage of having a blog is that I can post information immediately and you can receive it in real time. One can sign up and get any updates via email. If you are interested in following the blog, go to this address: msfruitextension.wordpress.com and read through some of the posts there. There is a “Follow” button that allows anyone to receive new posts on email. I also started a Twitter account. What is Twitter? It is essentially a micro-blog where tidbits are “tweeted” (posted) in 140 characters or less. Often times there is a link to other information sources. I follow other Twitter users and look at their posts for good information. If I find something of interest, then I “retweet” (re-post) it for my readers. I definitely try not to post superfluous stuff (you will not get a message on what I had for lunch, etc.), but mainly things that strike me as good ideas or areas of further interest related to fruit production. My Twitter handle is [@ESTafne](https://twitter.com/ESTafne)

Freeze Damage? - Eric T. Stafne

The cold arctic airmass that moved through in February ended up causing some significant damage to blooms and developing fruit on blueberries. Dr. Donna Marshall of the USDA-ARS in Poplarville shared some plant tissue with me to evaluate, so I took some photos.



Unopened blooms are likely to have survived and will continue on to produce fruit. As you can see in the above photo, browning of the bloom tissue is an indication of freeze damage. Any blooms that were open will result in damage. The cold air was able to penetrate into the corolla to damage the reproductive organs thus rendering it untenable. The good news is that un-

opened flowers are likely to produce fruit.

All stages of development, and damage, on this twig. Browning of the corolla is not necessarily a death knell for the flower — if it was closed. The flower petal is not the crucial tissue, but rather the reproductive organs — stigma, style, ovary, pistil, anthers, etc.



Any set fruit will no longer be viable. It will be mushy and eventually shrivel. There were some unfortunate aspects to this freeze event — the winter had been very mild and bloom was earlier than normal. The cold event was a large airmass and not a radiation-type event, so there was not a lot of freeze protection that could be done. Southern highbush varieties, which typically bloom earlier than rabbiteyes, will be hit the hardest.

Chill Hour Readings for 2012

Donna Marshall, USDA-ARS

Chill hour readings are low this year, as many of you would have expected. It has been an exceptionally mild winter. We are really pushing the minimum number of chilling hours needed on some of the varieties. The far right column is the final readings from last year, so we are averaging about half the chilling that we received last winter. Let's keep our fingers crossed that we don't get any more freezes.

	<u>1/2/12</u>	<u>1/9/12</u>	<u>1/16/12</u>	<u>1/23/12</u>	<u>1/30/12</u>	<u>2/6/12</u>	<u>2/13/12</u>	<u>2/20/12</u>	<u>2/27/12</u>	2011
Crystal Springs	424	455	513			603	699	735	738	1300
Jones County		505	566	589	638	647		726	736	1320
Stone						496		577	619	1175
Verona	649	713	774	843	894	924	1051	1103	1137	1798
George							445			1002
Gulfport	305		391		438		477	483		1059
Wayne Co.	615	685	712	770	781	866	894	916	986	1408

These chill hour readings are based on temperatures below 45 °F, a common model used in many fruit crops. Other models have been established as well. The University of Florida has a good discussion of chill hour models here (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae452>), if you would like to read more about it.

Gulf South Blueberry Growers' Field Day

The Gulf South Blueberry Growers' Association will hold their annual Field Day on **Thursday, October 11, 2012**. Registration will begin at 8AM. Location will be at Tom Giles' place in Wayne County. More details will come later as the event gets closer. It should be a great event with lots of networking and learning to do, so keep this date open and tell all your friends.



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**New Website Coming
Soon!**



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New Fruit Extension Specialist

Dr. Eric Stafne is an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and the Coastal Research and Extension Center. His office is at the South Mississippi Branch Experiment Station in Poplarville. Eric is originally from Michigan and holds a B.S. in Forestry from Michigan State University, an M.S. in Horticulture from the University of Arkansas, and a Ph.D. in Plant Science from the University of Arkansas. He has an extensive background with fruit and nut crops, both in academic and applied settings. From 1994 to 1996, he was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal, West Africa where he worked with citrus and mango trees. After graduating from UA with his M.S. in 1999, he worked at the Sugarcane Research Station in Canal Point, Florida. From 2001 to 2005 he was a research technician at the University of Arkansas in the fruit breeding program. There he managed blackberries, blueberries, grapes, peaches, and strawberries. In 2005, he was hired as an Assistant Professor and State Extension Specialist for Fruit Crops at Oklahoma State University and worked there primarily with wine grapes and pecans until 2011 when he made the move to Mississippi State University. Eric is also the national project director for the eXtension Grape Community of Practice along with the eViticulture website.

