

NEW BLUEBERRY VARIETY PRODUCES HIGH EARLY SEASON YIELDS

After 12 years of breeding and seedling selection, David W. Weber, breeder, grower and owner of Florida Blueberry Nursery has released a new patent pending early Southern Highbush variety named 'Winter Bell.' "The whole journey started back in 1988 when we planted an acre of Sharpeblue. We weren't very sure that high bush blueberries would produce this far south but decided to try it anyway and they did just fine." says Weber. That was the beginning of what would become several successive milestones –like the 1991 opening of the first blueberry nursery south of Ocala to supply his own plants, the beginning of extensive yield testing of UF Stage IV varieties in 1999 which led to starting the breeding program in 2004. "Based on those early yield tests, I was able to define which cultivars would produce the earliest berries with the best qualities. It's taken years of yield trials, observations and comparisons to select 'Winter Bell' from the thousands of seedlings tested– and a little luck too."



VARIETY	AVG YIELD (LBS PER PLANT)	INCOME (PER PLANT)
Winter Bell Evergreen	5.2	\$26.72
Winter Bell Dormex	4.2	\$18.30
Jewel Dormex	1.9	\$8.32

Data collected 2/16/15 thru 4/30/15 - 18 month old plants.

Five plants/treatment replicated four times. Income reflects prices paid at the time of picking.

Weber, a mainstay in the Central Florida blueberry industry, earned his Bachelor's degree in botany in 1975 and his Master's from the University of Florida in Nematology in 1980. He worked exclusively in the Ag industry –managing the UF Extension Nematology Lab and later with Ciba Geigy Ag Chemicals– before starting his own company, The Doc Applications, Inc., in the 1980s. The acre he planted in the late '80s has grown to 31 acres, and he's continued to strive for innovation.

In 2004, Weber began the painstaking work of breeding unpatented UF Stage IV blueberry stock to select for earliness and superior plant and fruit qualities as well as growth in native soils. 'Winter Bell' is a vigorous grower in both pine bark and native spodic soil with a semi, upright habit and a healthy tolerance to common leaf and root diseases. Since the leaves persist throughout the winter, Winter Bell is an exceptional choice for both evergreen and organic systems. It boasts slightly bell-shaped, slightly tangy fruit that compare in size to 'Emerald' with exceptional bloom and picking scar.

Weber wanted to have multiple years of data tied to fruit prices that confirmed the promising results before releasing it. In three years' worth of yield testing, 'Winter Bell' out yielded Emerald and Jewel by ripening earlier and yielding more fruit than these and other varieties tested. In Florida's market window, it is becoming increasingly important to harvest the bulk of your fruit before Georgia begins. Dr. Gerard Krewer, Blueberry Consultant has been watching Winter Bell for several years and says, "Winter Bell' looks like one of the most promising new cultivars for the Central Florida area". In 2012 and 2013 testing, 'Winter Bell' was 50 percent ripe 7 days to 16 days sooner than either 'Jewel' or 'Emerald'. As the yield test tables indicate, when combining early ripening with the variety's higher yields, 'Winter Bell' delivers superior profitability.

2014 Randomized replicated (6X) Yield test 100 acre farm

VARIETY	Avg. grams per bush per pick date on bushes 9-18 months old										TTL avg gm/pt	TTL avg Lb/pt	Avg \$ per plant	Plant age
	price on date	\$8.03	\$6.98	\$7.33	\$6.21	\$6.21	\$5.79	\$5.15	\$4.99	\$4.25				
	03/31/14	04/03/14	04/07/14	04/10/14	04/12/14	04/14/14	04/22/14	04/29/14	05/06/14					
W.B no Dormex	85	50	123	56	52	67	237	259	155	1084	2.4	\$13.75	9 months	
W.B. Dormex	17	18	66	61	35	50	196	205	127	774	1.7	\$9.36	9 months	
Jewel	13	12	29	15	20	26	102	131	109	456	1.0	\$5.37	8 months	
Spring high	9	12	30	16	12	9	29	25	23	165	0.3	\$2.17	9 months	
Flicker	1	1	6	4	4	5	34	50	18	123	0.2	\$1.42	18 months	

Notice the amount of fruit picked in the first three columns- this indicates a high yield early in pick season, when prices for fruit are at their highest levels.



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