‘Ochlockonee’ Rabbiteye Blueberry

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‘Ochlockonee’ (ok-LAHK-uh-nee) is a rabbiteye blueberry (Vaccinium ashei Reade) jointly released by the Univ. of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Univ. of Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station, and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture–Agricultural Research Service. Named after the Ochlockonee River in south Georgia, ‘Ochlockonee’s primary attribute is that it ripens late in the rabbiteye season with ‘Tifblue’, yet yields and berry size have been superior to those of ‘Tifblue’ in south Georgia. ‘Ochlockonee’ berries are medium- to large-sized, of high quality, and can be mechanically harvested.

Origin

‘Ochlockonee’ was selected in the mid 1960s at the Coastal Plain Experiment Station in Tifton, Ga., from a cross of ‘Tifblue’ x ‘Menditto’, and was tested as selection T-105 (Austin, 1994; Brightwell, 1963; Brooks, 1970). A schematic diagram of the pedigree of ‘Ochlockonee’ is shown in Fig. 1. The selection was evaluated for several years during the 1970s, but was not released. In the late 1980s, the selection was revived for testing as a release and was planted anew with ‘Tifblue’ at the Univ. of Georgia’s Blueberry Research Farm near Alapaha. Resulting data from several years indicate that ‘Ochlockonee’ is high yielding and should be adapted to areas conducive to rabbiteye blueberry production.

Description and Performance

‘Ochlockonee’ has been primarily compared with the late season rabbiteye standard ‘Tifblue’. In Alapaha, Ga., productivity of ‘Ochlockonee’ substantially exceeded that of ‘Tifblue’ in three out of the past five years for plants that were established in 1986 (Table 1). In fact, the 5-year average yield for ‘Tifblue’ in south Georgia was only 59% of that of ‘Ochlockonee’. In addition to high yield, ‘Ochlockonee’ had greater berry weight than ‘Tifblue’, especially for first harvest berries (Table 2). These two properties alone make this selection desirable as a highly productive, late-season rabbiteye cultivar.

Other attributes, such as berry scar, berry color, berry firmness, plant vigor, etc., for ‘Ochlockonee’ are comparable to ‘Tifblue’ (Table 3). ‘Ochlockonee’ generally ripens a few days later than ‘Tifblue’, while bloom dates are similar, a trait favorable for escaping spring freeze damage in the south Georgia area (Table 4). The estimated chill requirement of the new cultivar was 574 chill hours (Table 5). ‘Ochlockonee’ had fewer days between bloom and ripening than ‘Tifblue’ (Table 6). The selection was planted anew with ‘Tifblue’ at the Blueberry Research Farm near Alapaha. Resulting data from several years indicate that ‘Ochlockonee’ is high yielding and should be adapted to areas conducive to rabbiteye blueberry production.

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Table 5. Ratings of fruit (berry) and plant attributes of ‘Ochlockonee’ and ‘Tifblue’ rabbiteye blueberries at Griffin, Ga., for 2002. Ratings are on a scale of 1 = poorest to 10 = best, with a value of 7 generally considered “commercially acceptable.” Plants of both blueberry lines were established at the site in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berry/plant attribute</th>
<th>Ochlockonee</th>
<th>Tifblue</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berry size</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry scar</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry color</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry firmness</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry flavor</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant vigor</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop load</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripening date</td>
<td>2 July</td>
<td>26 June</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Means were significantly different at the 5% probability level (*), or not significantly different (NS) as determined by Fisher’s least significant difference tests.

‘Ochlockonee’ is vigorous and upright, with a fairly narrow crown. Plants produce an abundance of fruiting wood each year, with only moderate cane growth. Some stem disease lesions (Gloeosporium minus and/or Septoria albopunctata) have been observed on an older planting of ‘Ochlockonee’ in south Georgia, but they have caused no serious production problems. ‘Ochlockonee’ is easily propagated from softwood cuttings.

As with most rabbiteye blueberry cultivars, it is recommended that ‘Ochlockonee’ be planted with another rabbiteye cultivar with a similar bloom time for cross-pollination. In south Georgia, it is likely that the cultivars Brightwell and Powderblue would be suitable pollinizers for ‘Ochlockonee’.

Availability

A U.S. Plant Patent for ‘Ochlockonee’ has been applied for on behalf of the Univ. of Georgia Research Foundation. Contact the Georgia Seed Development Commission, 2420 S. Milledge Ave., Athens, GA 30606, for information on plant source and availability. Neither the Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station nor the USDA–ARS have plants for sale or distribution.

Literature Cited


