

# **Background**

As newcomers settle in Florida from northern regions, they often favor traditional subtropical and tropical crops like citrus and papaya. However, challenges such as citrus greening and sensitivity to cold spells in specific zones can hinder the success of these crops, particularly in northern Florida counties.

With Florida's population surpassing 20 million and urbanization on the rise, homeowners are compelled to opt for crops that demand fewer resources like water, fertilizers, and pesticides. Water conservation is paramount for sustaining Florida's environment and economic vitality, necessitating alternative fruiting crops that promote water quality and reduce unnecessary chemical use.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping<sup>™</sup> principles offer guidance to residents seeking sustainable practices. Moreover, the introduction of new blackberry cultivars requiring fewer chilling hours presents an appealing option for homeowners in northern Florida interested in fruit cultivation. This crop not only conserves water but also contributes to waste reduction, aligning with the principles of sustainable home gardening.

# **Objectives:**

- 1. Highlight the importance of adopting Florida-Friendly Landscaping principles to reduce resource inputs such as water, fertilizers, and pesticides, thereby enhancing water conservation, promoting water quality, and minimizing environmental impact.
- 2. Showcase the benefits of new blackberry cultivars that require lower chilling hours, emphasizing their suitability for Florida's climate and their potential to contribute to water conservation and waste reduction in home gardening and encourage them to explore alternative fruiting crops like blackberries.

## Methods

Workshops were conducted in Flagler and Putnam counties in Florida to educate homeowners on sustainable management practices for growing blackberries, mulberries, and goji berries. Each workshop lasted for three hours and covered various aspects of sustainable cultivation techniques, including soil preparation, watering methods, pest management, and pruning strategies.

At the conclusion of the workshop, homeowners were provided with the opportunity to select two plants of their choice from the three fruiting species discussed. Additionally, they received comprehensive information on each crop, including planting instructions, care guidelines, and troubleshooting tips, to support successful cultivation in their home gardens.

Cultivars Selected:

- Blackberry: <u>Rubus spp</u> 'Osage'
- Blackberry: <u>Rubus spp</u> 'Prime Ark® Freedom'
- Mulberry: <u>Morus nigra</u> 'Dwarf Everbearing'
- Goji Berry: <u>Lycium barbarum</u>



### Results



Knowledge increase regarding gardening with berries. (n=15)

Flagler ·Putnam ·Total





Changes that will be made to landscape from this workshop. (n=15)

An Equal Opportunity Institution.

**Putnam County Agent going over** 

blackberry maintenance

### **3-Month Follow-up**

A follow-up survey was distributed to workshop participants three months after the workshop to assess the current status of their plants, observe any behavioral changes, and gauge their perceptions.

• From the 15 participants we were currently able to get 4 responses. • After this workshop participants stated that they were somewhat (3 participants) and extremely likely (1 participants) to select berry products from their local grocery store.



**Current state of plant selected. (n=4)** 



1.5

0.5

# Discussion

Participants gained valuable insights into sustainable gardening practices by applying Landscaping<sup>™</sup> principles to cultivate berries such as blackberry, goji berry, and mulberry. By emphasizing the importance of selecting the right cultivars, particularly within the blackberry species, homeowners were empowered to grow fruiting crops while making environmentally sustainable choices in their gardens. This approach not only promotes biodiversity but also contributes to water conservation and waste reduction, aligning with the overarching goals of sustainable gardening.