

Blueberry Breeding in Michigan

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The highbush blueberry grows naturally in Michigan about as far north as the lower end of Saginaw Bay. North of that line, several species of the native lowbush blueberry are found growing. Trial plantings of the highbush blueberry were made in more than 20 places in northern Michigan, but it was found that the growing season there was too short for its successful culture.

It was realized as far back as 1926 that there might be great possibilities in hybridizing the northern Michigan lowbush blueberry with the highbush blueberry grown commercially in southwestern Michigan. Accordingly, exploring trips were made in northern Michigan in the summers between 1926 and 1930. The most promising native lowbush plants were located and moved to South Haven where they were used in crosses with the best highbush varieties.

For many years the results were quite discouraging. The very low growing habit of the lowbush was dominant in the new seedlings; also, crosses were not found with fruit as large as the highbush blueberry together with bright blue color. Fortunately, in 1951, one combination of parents produced several seedlings that had the desired characteristics. The following year several more seedlings were found that looked very promising from the same combination of parents. It is believed that among these selections, individuals can be found that will produce berries as large and well colored as the best high-

bush varieties and that will do well in the short growing season of northern Michigan. These plants will also be sufficiently dwarfed in size to be covered with snow in northern Michigan. Snow protection seems essential for hardiness in that part of the state.

Varieties are being obtained from these crosses that will attain a maximum height of about four feet. These may be useful in cultivated blueberry areas where highbush varieties soon grow too tall for economical harvesting. Heavy pruning to keep them lower reduces the total crop.

Other characters inherited from the lowbush which may prove to be valuable in highbush producing areas are greater drought resistance, and a tendency to ripen the crop in fewer pickings, thereby lowering harvesting cost.

Our friends in England find themselves badly in need of new apple varieties. J. M. S. Potter reports in *The Grower* (May 5, 1956) that Worcester Permain and Cox Orange Pippin make up more than half of the acreage of dessert apples grown in England. Although artificial storage has extended the season of these two old varieties, there is a need for superior earlier and later varieties.

Harry F. Byrd, of Winchester, West Virginia, has reported, following a tour of the Northwest, that the Delicious apple sports Royal Red, Red King and Early Red appear especially promising for that area.

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