

The Cultivated Highbush Blueberry, a Relatively New Fruit

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By FRANKLIN A. GILBERT, University of Wisconsin

Not all areas have suitable conditions for commercial production, which means that the industry is quite limited as to the number of states producing blueberries and actually to certain areas within these states. The states most actively engaged in the commercial production of this fruit are New Jersey, Michigan, North Carolina, Massachusetts and Washington. However, there are other states, particularly along the eastern seaboard, where limited acreage has been planted. In 1943 the estimated value of the cultivated crop was \$1,525,000, with an additional \$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000 from wild plants receiving very little care. The value of the cultivated crop has increased considerably since that time and rather rapid commercial expansion is still under way.

Even though the blueberry does not thrive on the average garden soil without special care, it is finding its way into many home plantings. This is true because of its ornamental as well as fruit value. The plants have a special appeal to many persons for landscape use as individual bushes, mass plantings, or in hedges. The bare reddish-green twig color during the winter months, the very attractive white blossoms in the spring, the dark

green foliage of summer, and the various shades of red leaf color in the autumn are all very pleasing to the eye. Perhaps the most discouraging fact is that the ripening fruit has to be protected from the birds with some type of netting, such as cheesecloth, tobacco cloth, or green plastic netting.

The highbush blueberry grows naturally where the soil is acid and moist, and similar conditions must be furnished in the home garden if it is to produce satisfactorily. A loose open soil, such as azaleas and mountain laurel enjoy, will grow blueberries. In dry period, water must be provided or the plants will suffer severely and may even die.

Strange as it may seem, even though the highbush blueberry is a native of swamps and moist lands and needs ample moisture during the growing season, the garden soil must be well drained. A water table a foot to a foot and a half below the surface is desirable, but the lack of such a water table can be compensated for with mulch.

The blueberry is a very shallow-rooted bush, so cultivation must be shallow. In fact, in recent years, experiments have been conducted to study the effect of mulching the blueberry with leaves, straw, sawdust, etc., to avoid cultivation and



Fig. 3. An upland blueberry planting grown with a heavy mulch at the N. J. Exp. Station, New Brunswick, N. J.

the consequent root disturbances, as well as to keep the soil cool, to retain moisture and to control weeds. One of the illustrations shows a patch of blueberries heavily mulched at the New Jersey Experiment Station. When mulching is practiced, heavier applications of nitrogen must be made, until the mulch begins to decay considerably.

Blueberry plants may be obtained from nurseries in spring or fall, for they transplant readily in March and April, and are also easily established in September and October. As they are in full leaf the latter months, they should be pruned back.

It should be remembered that the

highbush blueberry is only one of several species of blueberries from which crops are picked in the United States. The lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) is harvested extensively from the wild in New England and parts of Canada, and the Rabiteye blueberry (*Vaccinium ashei*) is harvested from the wild and from limited cultivation in the southeastern States. Since the different species are adapted to such varied conditions and even though they have different chromosome numbers, there is considerable interest and rather surprising success with interspecific crosses. This is a new phase of the breeding work, one which is progressing along with the normal

crossing of promising selections within a given species.

The development of the relatively new blueberry industry can be easily traced through the various publications of the U. S. and State Departments of Agriculture, which are available at nominal fees from the respective institutions. Also, the

parents of all the varieties from crosses can be traced, which again is an added advantage over the majority of our other fruits. Since it is such a recent development, and since the possibilities are so great, it is more or less a fruit breeders' "Paradise."—The Garden Journal of the New York Botanical Garden.



Fig. 4. The well-known Rubel (left) and the newer Berkeley blueberry showing relative size and color of varieties.

Northern Highbush Blueberry Variety Characteristics

Table 1

~~By John C. Cain~~
~~New York Agricultural Experiment Station~~

Time of maturity, fruit character, and bush shape are the chief characteristics to look for in varieties.

Ten of the preferred common varieties, listed in order of their characteristics are shown below:

Varieties of blueberries and some of their characteristics

Season (early to late)	Berry Size (large to small)	Berry Color (light to dark)	Bush Shape (erect to spreading)
Weymouth	Berkeley	Berkeley	Rubel
Rancocas	Coville	Stanley	Rancocas
Stanley	Atlantic	Jersey	Pemberton
Berkeley	Pemberton	Atlantic	Stanley
Atlantic	Jersey	Rubel	Jersey
Pemberton	Weymouth	Burlington	Burlington
Rubel	Stanley	Rancocas	Berkeley
Jersey	Burlington	Coville	Coville
Burlington	Rancocas	Pemberton	Weymouth
Coville	Rubel	Weymouth	Atlantic

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