

## BLUEBERRY CULTURE OFFERS NEW AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

A Valuable Fruit That Thrives Only on Sour or Acid Land Worthless for Most Crops—Through Selection and Hybridization Blueberries as Large as Concord Grapes Have Been Produced—Propagation of Selected Plants Requires Great Skill and Care.

Blueberries as large as Concord grapes have been produced through the production of the culture has more to mere addition of soil industry to existence. Blueberry soils so acid as worthless for ordinary agricultural purposes. Blueberry culture, therefore, not only promises to add to the general welfare through the utilization of land almost valueless, otherwise, but it offers a profitable industry to individual land owners in certain districts in which general agricultural conditions are especially hard and unpromising, and it suggests the possibility of further utilization of such lands by means of other crops adapted to acid conditions. Blueberry Grows Only in Acid Soil Success in blueberry culture rests especially on the recognition of two peculiarities in the nutrition of these plants, says Frederick V. Coville in a new department bulletin No. 974, Directions for Blueberry Culture, 1921, recently issued by the United States Department of Agriculture. These peculiarities are the requirement of an acid soil and their possession of a root fungus that appears to have the beneficial function of supplying them with nitrogen. Good aeration of the soil is another essential. Although the highbush or swamp blueberry occurs frequently in swamps or other wet places, the plants occupy situations which are exposed to air during the root-forming period of summer and autumn. The swamp blueberry grows best in soils naturally or artificially supplied with adequate moisture.

Next in importance to soil conditions is a convenient location with reference to a good market, the bulletin points out. The berries should reach their destination without delay, preferably early in the morning following the day of picking. To secure the best price the yshould also reach the market before the height of the main wild blueberry season. A situation to the south of the great areas of wild blueberries in northern New England, Canada, and northern Michigan is therefore desirable. One of the most promising districts for blueberry culture is the cranberry region of New Jersey, for there an ideal soil occurs in conjunction with an early maturing season and excellent shipping facilities to the markets of Philadelphia and New York.

The importance of superior varieties is particularly stressed in the bulletin. From the market standpoint, the features of superiority in a blueberry are sweetness and excellence of flavor; large size; light blue color, due to the presence of a dense bloom over the dark-purple or almost black skin; "dryness," or freedom from superficial moisture, especially the fermenting juice of broken berries; and plumpness; that is, freedom from the withered or wrinkled appearance that the berries begin to acquire several days after picking.

The cultivator is urged to begin with the purchase of a few plants of selected hybrid varieties, or by the transplanting of the best wild bushes selected when in fruit for the size, color, flavor, and earliness of the berry and the vigor and productiveness of the bush. These he should propagate by layering, by division, and by cuttings. Through a combination of these methods, a valuable old plant can often be multiplied by several hundred at one propagation, the fruit of the progeny retaining all the characteristics of the parent. Detailed directions for the various methods of propagation are given in the bulletin.

**Clean Cultivation Is Desirable**  
In field planting it is recommended to prepare the land by cultivation previous to setting, so as to subdue the wild growth. Plants of the wild swamp blueberry or its hybrids should be placed 8 feet apart each way, as they will nearly or quite cover the ground when they reach full size. When first planted, however, bushes are preferably set 4 feet apart in the row, with the rows 8 feet apart. This spacing permits machine cultivation in one direction.

The lowbush berry may be spaced 3 by 6 feet, which will give the plants adequate room for many years. Tillage should be given to keep down weeds and grass, and is best done by horse cultivation with a spring-tooth harrow, supplemented by careful hand hoeing and hand weeding close around the plants. Tillage should be shallow, as the roots are very close to the surface.

The use of manure or fertilizer is not advised at present in soils which contain the proper proportion and quality of peat and sand. The Department of Agriculture is carrying on experiments in the cultivation of blueberries at Washington, D. C., and at Whitesbog, near Browns Mills, N. J. At the latter place a field of hybrids of about one-third of an acre set at 3 by 5 feet bore at the rate of 96 bushes an acre when 7 years old and 117 bushes the following year. The berries sold in New York at a little over \$10 a bushel. They bore a light crop the second year after planting, and the following year produced nearly 30 bushels an acre.

A copy of the bulletin may be obtained free on application to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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