

## **ODE TO THE BLUEBERRY**

### ***Vaccinium corymbosum***

**By Jan Southern**

My high bush blueberry is flush with plump blueberries right now, and each year it's a battle with the turkeys, deer, birds, and the humans to see who can reap the bounty of the mighty blueberry first! With powerful antioxidants and a great sweet taste, it certainly supports a multitude of critters! No wonder, as it's only 80 calories per cup, full of fiber, vitamin C, and manganese. I can't think of anyone that doesn't love a blueberry! And who can resist a wonderful blueberry smoothie, or a handful in yogurt or oatmeal in the morning?

Botanists estimate blueberries came on the scene more than 13,000 years ago. They are indigenous to North America. The Native Americans loved blueberries as tribal elders spoke of them as "star berries" from the Great Spirit sent to ease children's hunger during famine. They called blueberries "star berries" because the blossom end of each berry (the calyx) forms a perfect 5 point star.

In the early 1900's Elizabeth White and Dr. Frederick Coville teamed up to develop blueberry plants with the most desirable properties. Coville and White produced the first commercial crop of blueberries out of Whitesbog, NJ in 1916. Whitesbog is an important part of the history of the blueberry and cranberry culture in the U.S. It's listed on both National and State Registers of Historic Sites. Whitesbog includes the village and surrounding 3000 acres of cranberry bogs, blueberry fields, reservoirs, sugar sand roads and Pine Barren forests.

From a botanical perspective, blueberries are part of a plant family (Genus *Vaccinium*) that includes the flowering azalea, mountain laurel, and heather plants. As you know, they like acidic soil and plenty of sun and water. It is a long lived perennial shrub that can get as tall as 12 feet, but most are about 6 feet high. They love 2-4 inches of mulch over the roots to conserve water and help with weed control. Bark mulch, acid compost, sawdust, and grass clippings are all good sources to use. In the spring, the bees pollinate the white blossoms and each blossom eventually becomes one blueberry. They start off hard and green, then reddish purple, and finally an indigo blue. Fresh blueberries are available year around with North American blueberries available from April – October and South American blueberries available from November – March. In the U.S., 38 states produce blueberries, and 6 of them account for more than 90% of the highbush crop: MI, NJ, OR, CA, GA, and WA. In Canada, British Columbia is the prime growing area. Lowbush blueberries are used mostly in food processing, and are grown in ME and Eastern Canada.

With that, get out there and take advantage of the blueberry season happening now in Virginia! Take advantage of the bounty, go to a blueberry festival, plant some blueberry bushes, or just make a cool yummy blueberry smoothie at home and enjoy!

Resources: National Audubon Society – Field Guide to the Mid-Atlantic States.p.125.  
HYPERLINK "http://www.blueberrycouncil.org"  
[www.blueberrycouncil.org](http://www.blueberrycouncil.org)  
HYPERLINK "http://www.ext.vt.edu" [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu) Pub. 426-840  
HYPERLINK "http://www.whitesbog.org" [www.whitesbog.org](http://www.whitesbog.org)

More Info on these websites listed below:

HYPERLINK "http://www.blueberry.org" [www.blueberry.org](http://www.blueberry.org)  
HYPERLINK "http://www.littlebluedynamos.com" [www.littlebluedynamos.com](http://www.littlebluedynamos.com) (recipes)  
HYPERLINK "http://www.chincoteagueblueberryfestival.com"  
[www.chincoteagueblueberryfestival.com](http://www.chincoteagueblueberryfestival.com)  
HYPERLINK "http://www.ext.vt.edu" [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu) (Small Fruit in the Home Garden – Pub.  
426-840)  
HYPERLINK "http://www.whitesbog.org" [www.whitesbog.org](http://www.whitesbog.org)