

# State fair bestows long-overdue respect on the blueberry

BY SUZANNE ZIMMER LOWERY  
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Blueberries took center stage at the recent New Jersey State Fair, held at the Sussex County fairgrounds in Augusta.

With a boost last year from a group of fourth-graders in Brick who petitioned the Legislature to have the blueberry named the state fruit, the Highbush Blueberry was ready for its close-up. Fair organizers then decided to add the blueberry category to its roster of homemade food products to be judged.

The well-attended contest was as homespun as the rest of the fair.

In the middle of a quonset hut, amidst the colorful lights of the midway, a phalanx of racing pigs, and the livestock pavilion, four judges, presiding on a little blue dais painted with

white stars, sampled blueberry cookies, cakes, pies, muffins, breads, tarts and tortes of all shapes and sizes.

Participants, with their friends and families, waited anxiously in the rows of cherry red chairs, while a steady stream of onlookers gobbled up every morsel of the post-judging leftovers.

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Although Dottie Maciejczk of Sparta has been on the panel for only four years, she earned her judging stripes through sweat equity as a longtime participant, earning 17 ribbons in one year alone. "I love seeing the various recipes as they come in, especially the pies," Maciejczk said.

For Margaret Hait of Hardyston, a family and consumer services teacher, the job is a labor of love. "I've been coming to the fair my entire life," she said. "I just love it, and blueberries are my favorite fruit."

One participant, Judy Nylén of Branchville, who sat quietly knitting throughout the event, was so inspired that, in addition to entering a muffin and a jam, she created a blueberry potato salad and blueberry corn salsa for sampling. Next year, she's thinking about bringing along some blueberry soup.

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 JUDY NYLEN

"Blue food is the hardest thing for people to deal with, but when I saw blue potatoes at the farmers' market, I got creative."

She equates the new variety of spud with a Yukon Gold or Fingerling potato. "They're a little waxy, so they hold together really well. When I added the berries and just a touch of white balsamic vinegar and some oil, the salad was a perfect mix of sweet and savory."

When the judging was over, first prize went to Sue DeCamp of Blairstown. Although she wasn't on hand to receive her award, her blueberry Bavarian sweet dough pie was a gorgeously decadent layering of deep-dish crust brushed with melted white chocolate,



ROBERT SCIARRINO/THE STAR-LEDGER

The winning entry from Sue DeCamp is this blueberry Bavarian pie.

## Freezing fresh blueberries

1. After purchasing, place unwashed berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place in the freezer.
2. When frozen, transfer blueberries to an airtight plastic bag or container and return to the freezer.
3. Measure and wash frozen berries before using.

— United States Highbush Blueberry Council

cooked sweetened berries, cool blueberry Bavarian cream, and a garnish of whipped cream and fresh berries.

Corinne Pierce of Branchville took second place with her 5-inch-tall blueberry cake dusted with powdered sugar. In third place, Dawn Dembowski of Newton, who also won a ribbon in the chili cook-off, created a double blueberry pie spread with cooked and fresh berries over a lemony cream cheese filling that was decorated with a wreath of blue mums, and has the added advantage of being low-fat and sugar free.

It may seem like a lot of fuss over a little bitty fruit that most take for granted, but this year's

tribute to New Jersey's blueberries is really long overdue.

In the late 1800s, when Elizabeth C. White, the daughter of a prominent southern New Jersey owner of a cranberry farm, proposed the idea of cultivating the wild blueberries growing between the bogs, it was commonly considered an impossible folly since there were so many different types and qualities of berries growing together.

White's years of effort working with experts and paying the local "pineys" to seek out and transplant the choicest specimens to her acreage paid off in 1916, when her plan came to fruition with the first

## Blueberry Bavarian Pie

— Adapted from Sue DeCamp, first-place winner  
 Yields 1 (10-inch) pie

- 1½-2 ounces **white chocolate baking bar**
- 1 (10-inch) **pie crust**, baked and cooled
- 5 cups fresh **blueberries**, divided
- 1¼ cups **sugar**
- ¼ cup **cornstarch**
- 2 teaspoons **lemon juice**
- 1 envelope unflavored **gelatin**
- ¼ cup **cold water**
- 1 cup fresh **blueberries**
- ¼ cup, plus 1½ teaspoons **sugar**
- 1½ cups **whipping cream**
- Sweetened whipped cream**
- Fresh blueberries**

1. Melt the baking bar in the top of a double boiler over hot water. Brush on the inside of the baked crust.

2. For the filling, place 2½ cups blueberries in a large saucepan. Crush the berries. Stir in 1¼ cups sugar and the cornstarch. Cook and stir on medium heat until the mixture comes to a boil and thickens. Cool. Stir in the remaining 2½ cups of blueberries and lemon juice. Refrigerate.

3. For the Bavarian layer, place the gelatin in cold water to soften. Puree 1 cup of blueberries. Heat the puree in a small saucepan on low heat. Add gelatin to puree. Stir until dissolved. Stir in ¼ cup plus 1½ teaspoons sugar. Remove from heat. Cool until almost set. Beat whipping cream in a small bowl of an electric mixer set at high speed, until stiff peaks form. Fold one-third of the cream into the puree. Fold puree into the remaining whipped cream and refrigerate.

4. To assemble, spoon two thirds of the filling into the coated crust. Cover with the Bavarian layer. Spoon the remaining one third of the filling into the center of the Bavarian. Top the pie with whipped cream and garnish with fresh berries. Refrigerate until firm.

## Nutrition information

Per 5-ounce serving:  
 280 calories; 120 calories from fat; 2g protein; 42g carbs; 33g sugar; 13g total fat; 8g saturated fat; 40mg cholesterol; 2g dietary fiber; 30mg sodium; 4% Daily Values calcium; 2% Daily Values iron

known marketable crop of blueberries to be sold.

In the years since, White's creation has grown to include 8,000 acres of cultivated Highbush blueberries being harvested in central

and southern counties, with New Jersey being the second largest producer in the country.

From folly to mainstay, the state fruit has earned its rightful place in New Jersey history.