

Rural New Yorker

The RURAL NEW-YORKER

1207

A New Fruit Industry

The Domesticated Blueberry



ORIGIN OF FRUITS—It is probable that all or most of our popular fruits were originally wild. They have been domesticated, improved and made subject to man as the dog, the cat and the horse or cow have been. Some of them, like the Baldwin apple, were evidently superior seedlings growing at random in the woods and likely to "blush unseen" until the end of their life unless by accident man chances to discover them and, noting their excellence, takes measures to improve and preserve them. We have no doubt there are now growing wild in the northern forests varieties of apples or pears superior to Baldwin, Northern Spy or Bartlett. Very likely there are seedling hickories which with care and full cultivation would excel most of the pecans in excellence. Man observes these superior specimens,

kindness, assuming that it would respond to garden culture like most of the lime-loving plants.

THE BLUEBERRY SECRET.—Finally the Department of Agriculture and Miss Elizabeth C. White of New Lisbon, N. J., discovered the simple secret. The blueberry is not a lime-loving plant. It does not want rich, alkaline garden soil. It knows just what it wants by locating in sour bogs or acid uplands, and knowing what it wants it will not submit to the wise theories of people who preach the title of LLD.—lime, legumes and drainage for all crops. The blueberry is an acid soil plant and proud of it! Some of the educators who undertake to force their theories upon determined country people might well take note of this—but that is another story!

ADAPTING THE SOIL.—At any rate the basis for successful blueberry culture lies in adapting the

She knew many of these pickers personally, and observed that now and then they brought in berries of very superior size and flavor. Some of them were quite as large as gooseberries. So she offered prizes or rewards to anyone who could find a bush producing berries of a certain size and lead her to it in the bogs. Each picker who cared to try it was given rings of certain sizes and these measured the berries that were needed. The result was that quite a number of very superior bushes were discovered. Miss White says that these pickers displayed a most remarkable instinct in locating these bushes for her. They would plunge into the woods; off the road, without any apparent landmark, and go straight to the bush. These superior native bushes have been used for propagating, and we believe that much scientific work at crossing has been carried out. These plants are not mere seedlings, dug up



A Cultivated Blueberry Plant Growing at Whitesbog, N. J. Fig. 497

takes them from the wilderness and gives them opportunity to develop, in the garden.

IMPROVING NATURE.—We are now witnessing the domestication of a new wild fruit—the blueberry. This fruit has ranked among the best that nature has to offer, but for years it seemed impossible to tame and domesticate it. Taken into captivity it pined away and died, as wild birds and animals so often do. During past years thousands of people have dug superior blueberry bushes and planted them carefully in the rich, mellow soil of good gardens. These people reasoned that if you take a plant from some thin sour land and give it every opportunity of fertile soil, lime and manure—of course it will appreciate the change and grow larger and finer than ever. It did not work that way. The blueberry bush showed itself as truly homesick as a boy or girl taken from some sterile valley far back among the hills and lodged in a palace with all the wealth and formality of palace life. Both blueberry and boy would pine away in such uncongenial surroundings. In one of his books, "A Labrador Doctor," Dr. Grenfell tells of trying to treat two little native boys. He wanted to be very nice and so, out of his scanty stores, he made a pot of cocoa and gave each boy a good-sized mug full. They tasted it, but when the doctor's back was turned they poured it on the ground—much preferring spring water. For many years people who tried to domesticate the blueberry killed it with

soil to the plant. The ideal situation would be about what you would select as a cranberry bog. In the future great tracts of land now considered too sour and sterile for growing ordinary crops will be considered ideal for blueberries. The crop is now sure to develop as a commercial proposition. It will utilize great tracts of land well nigh worthless at present, and give the market a new and greatly improved fruit. There is also some hope that by using acid chemicals ordinary cultivated land may be fitted for the crop. It is possible that by using inoculated sulphur the soil may be made fit for this acid-loving plant. As we know, this form of sulphur is used to prevent scab on potatoes by making the soil somewhat acid, so that the scab germ will develop slowly if at all. Such chemicals as acid phosphate, sulphate of ammonia or sulphate of aluminum may be used for the purpose. Perhaps in time we may learn how to grow good blueberries in common garden soil by using these acid chemicals.

EXPERIMENTS WITH THE PLANT. — Miss White's development of this fruit shows in a most interesting way how these superior wild things may be captured and held in captivity. The blueberry does not come true from its seeds. The actual wood of the superior plant must be used as grafts or rooted cuttings if its character is to be maintained. Miss White lives in a section where great quantities of wild blueberries are picked and marketed,

in the woods at random, but each plant has been propagated from a cutting or grafted with wood from some known variety, so that a plantation of these blueberries is as true to name as an orchard of McIntosh or Baldwin apples would be. The picture shows Miss White with one of these superior plants in bloom. Aside from its value as a fruit producer, this bush is as beautiful as an ornamental shrub. Those who follow this blueberry culture are witnessing the beginning of a great new industry which will, without question, add a new domestic fruit to our list, and give value to much land now lying idle and useless.