



I FOUND  
MY THRILL ON  
**BLUEBERRY  
HILL**

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**IF NEW JERSEY BLUEBERRIES** seem even plumper than usual this summer, it might be because they're about to burst with pride.

After a feisty campaign by elementary school students in Brick, state lawmakers have decreed that the blueberry is New Jersey's official fruit.

And if you've ever stood in a blueberry patch in early July, joined by happy bees and birds, you know they made the right decision.

The high bush blueberry is a lovely plant, with glossy oval leaves and graceful branches. During picking season — roughly late June through mid-July, depending on the weather — clusters of berries ripen from an initial waxy green-white to a blushing red to a glorious deep, dark blue. A ripe blueberry can look a little dusty, but will shine up the minute you pick it.

Pop it in your mouth and the berry explodes, slipping out of its thin jacket of a skin with a tart, sweet burst.





Blueberries are such convenient little fruits. There are no thorns on the bushes, unlike some raspberries and blackberries, and the berries grow high off the ground, so they don't get sandy like strawberries. Bushes on commercial farms grow to maybe 5 or 6 feet, and the berries grow all over the bush, so they're easily reached by children and adults alike.

In autumn, the dark green leaves of the blueberry bush turn a fiery, cranberry red, making the bush an ideal ornamental.

But autumn is far away (or so we'd like to think). For now, what should concern you most is the berry itself. Legions of Jersey blueberries will soon await you, eager to

be eaten with cream or in muffins or in pies or just plain.

"I like to put them on ice cream," said Glen Siewert, 11.

Glen, who is in fifth grade at Veterans Memorial Elementary School in Brick, is one of the many pupils responsible for the blueberry's elevated status. When he and his classmates were in fourth grade, they turned a lesson in New Jersey history into a real campaign.

The kids, led by teachers Gail Damiano and Suzanne Kurasz, wrote letters to legislators and eventually went to Trenton to support the bills introduced on behalf of the blueberry.

"Many little public speakers emerged and confidence

**AS A NATIVE PLANT, IT HAS A NOBLE HISTORY. NEW JERSEY WAS FIRST TO CULTIVATE THE BLUEBERRY FOR COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION — ELIZABETH COLEMAN WHITE DEVELOPED THE COMMERCIAL STRAIN IN 1916.**

was gained," Damiano said, reflecting on her students' efforts.

The pupils were surprised both at the work involved in passing a law and in their own success in doing so.

"It was a lot of work," recalled Tori Ash, 10. "I had to write letters and stuff."

"We couldn't be sure that the government would let kids have their voice," said Gabriella Catalano, 10.

The children carefully weighed the evidence before deciding to throw their support behind the blueberry. They considered the cranberry and the peach, both of which thrive in New Jersey. They thought about the tomato, because what's more New Jersey-ish than a Jersey tomato? But some people

think of the tomato as a fruit and some count it as a vegetable. That was just too much baggage.

The blueberry had no such skeletons in the closet. As a native plant, it has a noble history. New Jersey was first to cultivate the blueberry for commercial production — Elizabeth Coleman White developed the commercial strain in 1916. New Jersey is now second in the nation in blueberry production, after Michigan. In 2002, New Jersey farmers grew 42 million pounds of cultivated blues.

Any candidate for state fruit needs to have strong nutritional support. The blueberry did not disappoint on this issue: The berry is high in antioxidants and has been shown to fight cancer, diabetes and urinary tract in-



fections. Blueberries also support eyesight and brain function.

"I learned a lot, like I didn't know you could freeze them," said Tim Veltre, 10. "I see more blueberries all around now. My mom started growing a patch in the back yard."

"They're good when you eat them half-frozen, half-not," Gabriella Catalano added.

One of the newest ways to enjoy Jersey blueberries is in iced tea. Jersey Blues, a blueberry iced tea, was a collaborative effort among blueberry farmers and researchers at Rutgers University. This delicious beverage is both sweet and bracing. It's available in single-serve glass bottles at convenience stores, farms and other locations throughout New Jersey.

Area locations include: Wemrock Orchards, Freehold Township; Lincroft Christmas Tree Farm, Mid-

dletown; Wegman's, Manalapan; Stattel Farm Market, Marlboro; Peter's Farm Market and Welsh Farms, both Neptune; EZ Liquors, Toms River; Rutgers University Agriculture Museum, New Brunswick; and Terhune Orchards, Princeton.

Here are some area farms that offer blueberry picking:

**Boyce Berry Farm**, Route 537 (Burnt Tavern Road), Clarksburg.

(609) 259-9198. Call ahead for hours.

**Earth Friendly Organic Farm**, 17 Olde Noah Hunt Road, Cream Ridge.

(609) 259-9744. Call ahead for hours.

**Emery's Berry Patch**, Long Swamp Road, New Egypt. (609) 758-8514. Organic berries available for picking 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week in season.

**Terhune Orchards**, 330 Cold Soil Road, Princeton.

(609) 924-2310. Call ahead for hours.



THE HIGH BUSH BLUEBERRY IS A LOVELY PLANT, WITH GLOSSY OVAL LEAVES AND GRACEFUL BRANCHES.



## JERSEY BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

- 1 stick butter, at room temperature**
- 2 eggs, at room temperature**
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 3 cups flour, plus 3 tablespoons flour to dust berries**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**
- 2 tablespoons baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 ¼ cups buttermilk**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 cups blueberries**

■ Cream together butter, eggs and sugar in a large bowl.

■ In a smaller bowl, combine flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

■ In a third bowl, toss blueberries with reserved flour and set aside.

■ In a fourth bowl, mix vanilla extract and buttermilk. Add in thirds to creamed mixture, alternating with dry ingredients.

■ Fold berries into batter.

■ Spoon batter into lined muffin pans and bake at 400 degrees for about 15 minutes.

■ Cool muffins on rack. Makes about 18 big muffins.

*Adapted from Harrowsmith Country Life Baking Book by Sandra J. Taylor, Camden House Publishing, 1992.*



## DOUBLE PIE CRUST

- 2 ¼ cups flour**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 stick plus 5 ½ tablespoons butter, chilled**
- 4 tablespoons water, or more as needed**

■ Mix flour and salt together in a large bowl.

■ Add butter into mixture, cutting it into pea-sized bits

■ Sprinkle water, 1 tablespoon at a time, over mixture and toss with fork until a soft dough forms.

■ Knead dough on a lightly floured surface.

■ Shape dough into 2 disks. Wrap each in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

■ Roll out 1 disk of dough to a circle 2 inches bigger than the pie pan. Place in pie pan and chill until ready to fill. Reserve other disk for top crust.

*Adapted from "All-Butter, Fresh Cream, Sugar-Packed, No-Holds-Barred Baking Book" by Judy Rosenberg, Workman Publishing, 1991.*



## JERSEY BLUEBERRY PIE

- 2 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca**
- 4 ½ cup blueberries**
- ½ cup sugar**
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar**
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 ½ teaspoon cornstarch**
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon butter**
- 1 teaspoon peach schnapps**
- 9-inch double crust (see above)**

■ Crush ½ cup blueberries in a baggie. Strain and extract juice. Pour water over berries until juice measures ½ cup.

■ Combine sugar, brown sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon and salt in a large saucepan.

■ Add blueberry juice mixture.

■ Cook and stir on medium heat until it boils.

■ Remove from heat. Stir in butter and peach schnapps, then tapioca.

■ Carefully stir in berries.

■ Spoon mixture into unbaked pie crust in a 9-inch pan.

■ Add top crust.

■ Bake at 375 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes, or until filling is bubbly and crust is golden brown.

■ Cool and serve.

*Adapted from "Crisco Pies For All Seasons," a 1992 pamphlet.*

