

Berry interesting

Elizabeth White birthed South Jersey berry industry

By Loretta Jackson | Editor

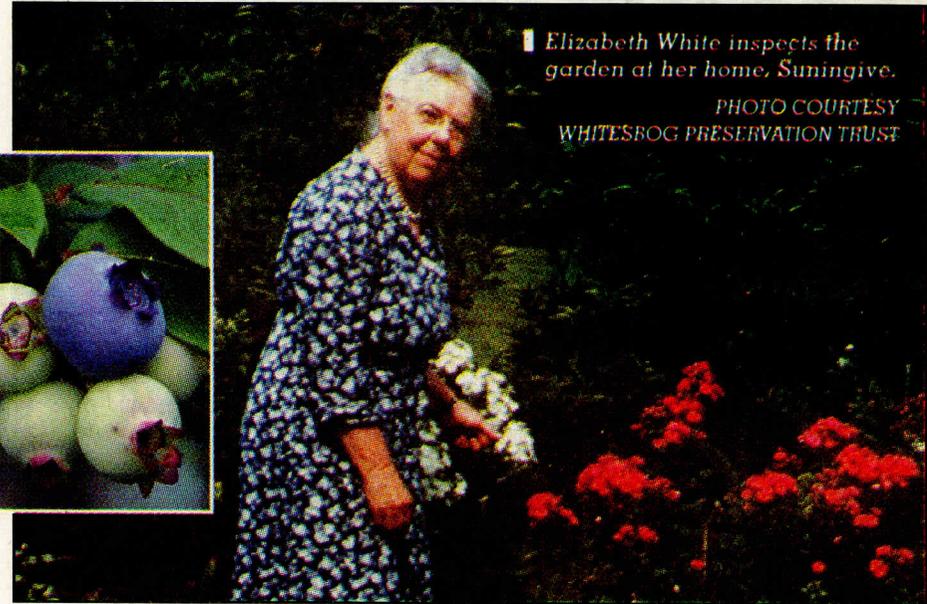
So sweet and so juicy the round sapphire gems growing fat in South Jersey's blueberry fields. So stark without them would be our muffins. Bland as sand would be our morning granola. The wondrous treat that is the blueberry was honored last year with a title: Official State Fruit of New Jersey. The thanks for that honor originate with a Jersey girl, Elizabeth C. White.

The gal who in 1893 began working at Whitesbog Plantation, her dad's cranberry farm, now is best known for developing there some heavenly co-crops: blueberry varieties that were big, tasty, hearty and up to the rigors of packing and shipping. It was Elizabeth who first propagated cuttings taken from wild bushes. A doctor friend with knowledge about hybrids counseled her. Local folks,

"Pineys," brought her samples of wild berries from miles around. She took the best of the best to nurture into production.

An ace horticulturalist and an advocate for workers' rights, her accomplishments warrant special recognition during Women's History Month. The South Jersey Tourism Corporation lists other remarkable women, online at www.visit-southjersey.com, in addition to regional events that honor other such heroines.

Elizabeth White spent much of her 83 years building her business and the region's economy, berry by berry. Hers is a fascinating story with many chapters. Learn more at Historic Whitesbog Village, located in Brendan T. Byrne State Forest at mile marker 13 on Route



Elizabeth White inspects the garden at her home, Sunningive.

PHOTO COURTESY WHITESBOG PRESERVATION TRUST

530, southeast of Browns Mills. That's in Pemberton Township in Burlington County, NJ. One can see there the payhouse, the potting shed, various propagating frames, berry packing houses, sorting sheds and tools utilized by immigrant workers. Elizabeth's home is nearby. Festivals abound there and special events are frequent.

Theresa Earley, executive director of the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, called the woman "amazing". She said, "Elizabeth began using cellophane to cover her blueberry boxes in 1916. She

was a researcher, a conservationist, a businesswoman, and so much more."

An upcoming event elaborates. On Saturday, March 26 at 4pm, the Whitesbog Preservation Trust will host a talk and a special \$5 tour of Elizabeth's home. Reservations: 609-893-4646 or by email: whitesbog@hotmail.com. While there, enjoy the general store and the nature trails, or take a tour to see the Tundra Swans wild territory. Biking trails, fishing, canoeing, walking tours and driving tours can be a part of any day there. Just walk on in, back in time. ■