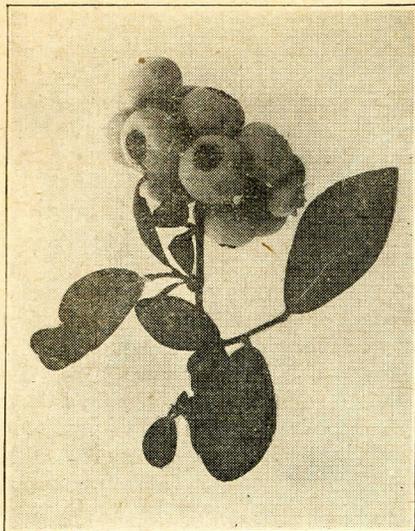


# Growing Blueberries Commercially

by Hyatt Watts



**Katherine blueberry.**

**L**IKE many other gifts of nature which were once considered worthless but are now held in high esteem, the blueberry was, until quite recently, believed to be of little commercial value. One fine day, however, the owners of some rocky, abandoned Maine farms, awoke and found themselves in possession of veritable gold mines.

Such lands have since sold for enormous prices. Commercial plantings in the eighth year have yielded at the rate of 117 bushels per acre and the fruit sold for \$11 a bushel—\$1,280 per acre. Wild bushes have been known to live to the age of 100 years.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the blueberry offers large possible profits. It is, however, the most difficult of all berries to grow. It is most exacting in its requirements and will not succeed unless all conditions are favorable.

### Needs Sour Soil.

In the first place, it will wither and die in rich, sweet soil, the kind in which other berries thrive. Blueberries demand a sour soil, the more acid the better. Lime affects the plants like poison.

Another unusual thing about the blueberry is that it gets its nitrogen by means of a mycorrhizal fungus, which grows on its roots. Like cranberries and unlike legumes, blueberries obtain nitrogenous food from non-nitrified organic matter.

A century of study and experimentation was necessary to place cranberry culture upon a profitable commercial basis. The problems connected with the propagation and culture

of blueberries have been found similarly difficult, but have been successfully solved.

### Buy Plants Carefully.

Credit for this important work is due chiefly to Dr. Frederick V. Coville, botanist of the United States Department of Agriculture, and Miss Elizabeth C. White of New Lisbon, N. J. The latter co-operated with the former in planting 27,000 seedling blueberries on 16 acres. A few of the best varieties thus developed were selected and given to nurserymen for propagation and sale, but the demand for plants far exceeds the supply. Unscrupulous dealers are selling inferior wild blueberry plants for high-quality hybrids. Buyers should, therefore, exercise due caution in purchasing blueberry nursery stock.

Like most fruits, the blueberry does not come true to seed, hence must be artificially propagated. Where budding or grafting is practiced numerous shoots come up from the root stock, rendering this method impracticable for field plantings. Cuttings may be

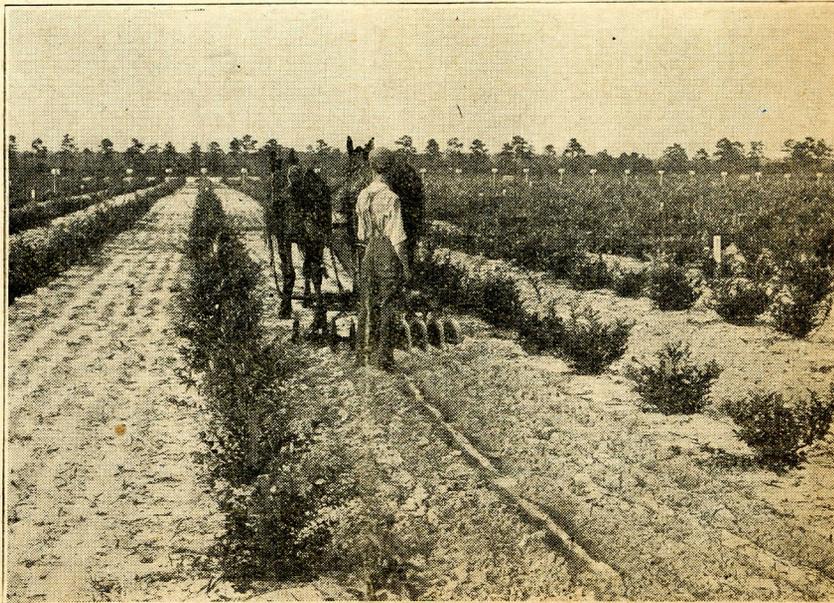
rooted in cold frames or greenhouses.

The best and easiest methods of blueberry propagation are "stumping" and "tubering." The former plan consists in cutting off the bush just above the ground and covering the stump with a few inches of sand. The new shoots which come up and send out roots into the sand are broken off and used for plants. The last named method consists of making short cuttings and burying them in sand, through which new growth pushes and is severed from the cutting, in much the same manner that sweet potato plants are propagated.

### When Plants Bear.

Blueberry plants begin to bear when three years old, but do not produce full crops until five to ten years of age. It is necessary to plant two good varieties together for cross pollination.

A cranberry bog would be an ideal location for a blueberry patch. It is unnecessary, however, to remove the top soil and replace it with sand, which is the operation known to cran-



**Cultivating the blueberry patch.**

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**Typical blueberry bush.**

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berry growers as turfing. A sandy sub-soil overlaid with 6 inches of peaty soil is considered ideal blueberry ground. By plowing 8 inches deep a thin layer of sand is brought to the surface, constituting a sort of self-sanding operation.

Plenty of moisture is essential, but the water level should be at least a foot below the surface during the growing season. Deep cultivation is injurious, as the bushes are shallow rooted. Rotted peat, soy bean meal, nitrate of soda, dried blood, steamed bone, phosphate rock and potash are all considered good fertilizers. Pruning consists of the removal of old and weak shoots. The plants are set 4 feet apart in rows 8 feet apart and when the bushes crowd each other every alternate one is removed.

#### **Western Blueberry Is Different.**

Efforts to transplant the blueberry on the Pacific coast were made by J. S. Dellinger of Astoria, but have not proved very successful. Prof. Coville suggests that failure may be due to the fact that chilling the plants by freezing winter temperatures is necessary for vigorous growth of the blueberry. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that this fruit would become acclimated and adapt itself to the mild, equable Pacific coast climate.

From Alaska various reports have come of blueberries growing there in great profusion and perfection. Prof.

*(Concluded on page 17)*