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THE ALL-AMERICAN BLUEBERRY: A BRIEF HISTORY

Blueberries are one of only three fruits native to North America (the others are Concord grapes and cranberries), but until fairly recently, the mystery of cultivating plump, juicy blueberries for widespread use remained unsolved.

The first colonists adopted the practices of Native Americans, picking wild blueberries to eat fresh during the summer or dry for the winter. Over time, farmers and horticulturalists tried to grow blueberries, but their experiments invariably failed.

Then, in the early 20th century, Elizabeth White initiated the work that led to the cultivation of the “high bush” varieties that produce the sweet, juicy berries we enjoy today.

White was born in 1871 and lived on a cranberry farm in Whitesbog, New Jersey, where blueberries grew around the bogs and in the piney woods near her home. In 1911, she read about Dr. Frederick Coville’s research in blueberry cultivation for the USDA and, realizing its potential, White was determined to work with Coville to develop a blueberry bush that could be planted and grown on farms.

After only five years, White and Coville had created new cultivars that consistently produced large, juicy berries by crossing carefully selected wild varieties. White then began an entirely new business—a nursery that supplied blueberry bushes to farmers in southern New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington, and a flourishing industry took root.

Elizabeth White is remembered for her pioneering efforts in blueberry cultivation, her business prowess and ingenuity. She shipped fresh blueberries from her 90-acre farm to grocery stores and was the first fruit grower to cover containers with cellophane, which revolutionized the way fruit was transported and handled. In 1927, working in a business

world dominated by men, she helped organize the New Jersey Blueberry Cooperative Association to support growers in the burgeoning blueberry business. She was the first woman to receive the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's citation and received numerous other awards and medals from horticultural organizations in many states. White lived at "Suningive," her home in Whitesbog, until her death in 1954.

Today, thanks to White's and Coville's vision and work, blueberries are commercially grown in 38 states and two Canadian provinces with new acres producing more blueberries than ever before, continuing and expanding a long tradition of blueberries in American culinary heritage.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.blueberrycouncil.org

www.blueberry.org

www.whitesbog.org

<http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biographies/white-ec.html>

http://pemaruccicenter.rutgers.edu/html/history_ewhite.html

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S13Mlr78fYU (Documentary trailer: *The Mighty Humble Blueberry*)

<http://nj.gov/pinelands/infor/curric/pinecur/tbs.htm>

http://www.njwomenshistory.org/Period_4/white.htm

http://www.freshplaza.com/news_detail.asp?id=24494

