

## **Blueberry and Family (*Vaccinium*)**

**By Rebecca Hargrave**

Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)

Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*)

Cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*)

Lingonberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea minus*)

Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia* spp.)

The blueberry genus is quite large with many varieties and cultivars, a number are gears for traditional blueberry farming. This will only touch on some of the varieties better suited for small scale and forest farming production, and will refer to them in general as blueberry.

Blueberry is found in forests all across the US and is favored by humans and wildlife like. Small bluish fruit hang from reddish yellow twigs in the summer, and are preceded by pink bell shaped flowers in spring. Blueberries require very acidic soil, pH 4.5-5.5, and subsequently can only fit into a few landscapes. The berry can be made into a wide variety of dishes, too many to name here. Sandy well-drained soils are preferred and blueberries will grow well in shade.

Many types of wild blueberries are in commercial production, most being canned or frozen, and fresh blueberries are popular among you-pick enthusiasts.

**Highbush Blueberry:** It grows to six feet in height and is the most common blueberry in cultivation. There are hundreds of varieties, so pick the one that best fits your landscape and schedule.

**Lowbush Blueberry:** It grows to only 2 feet in height and is commercially grown as a wild crop in Maine.

**Cranberry:** It grows to be only 2-6" tall and spreads along the ground. The red berries are known for their tartness. Commercial varieties are available for production, and it does not have to be grown in a bog, or under any flooded conditions (they're just easier to pick that way). There are many applications for the tradition-evoking berry including the ever-popular cranberry sauce.

**Lingonberry:** It is more closely related to cranberry than blueberry, lingonberry is a favorite of Scandinavians. This 4" tall plant with red ¼" berries ripens in late summer and has an acidic taste. Native to Europe it has been cultivated widely. It is primarily used in jellies.

**Huckleberry:** True huckleberries are not *Vaccinium* at all but in the genus *Gaylussacia*. The name huckleberry is often used to describe other minor crop blueberries of the above categories. *Gaylussacia* and *Vaccinium* are both in the *Ericaceae* family with similar traits and site requirements, but huckleberry has a much different taste than the true blueberries. Fruiting during the summer, on acid soils, the leaves are more round in appearance than true blueberries, but the fruit is just as versatile and tasty.