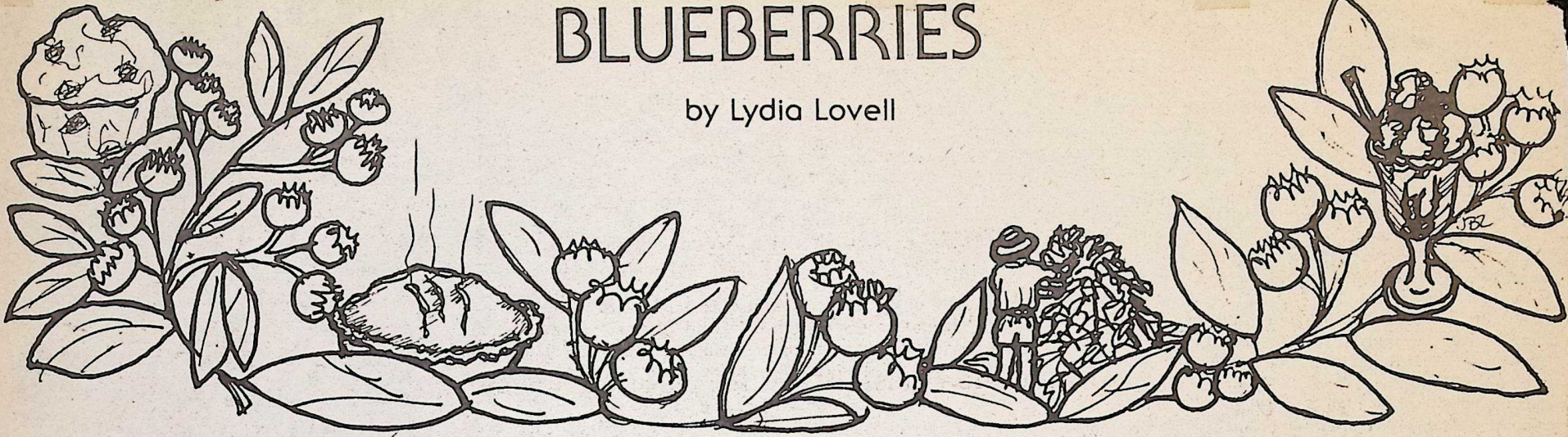


# BLUEBERRIES

by Lydia Lovell



Whatever the cause of acid rain, and whatever harm it does to Cape Cod pond life, many land plants growing almost everywhere on the Cape will probably thrive with increased acidity from rains. Among them: the blueberries.

Whether ground-hugging, knee-britches level, or high bush, blueberries require acid soil to produce fruit. Aunt Olivia never knew, nor did I until recently, that over three dozen varieties of high bush blueberry have been developed by commercial blueberry growers and the United States Department of Agriculture. Another thing she wasn't aware of was that blueberries and cranberries are first cousins.

Since blueberry bushes account for a large percentage of the understorey of wooded acreages in this part of the country, growing them commercially has been undertaken by only a few orchardists. Most homeowners have but to spare the native undergrowth when mowing and let nature ripen the azure fruit. Harvest begins as early as mid-July in some varieties; others ripen as late as mid-September.

"Harvest begins" is a phrase chosen with care; humans are far from being the only creatures which appreciate the sweet flavor of blueberries. Birds will strip the ripe fruit from bushes in short order. What birds overlook, chipmunks will find. Although covering the bushes with netting may save enough berries for family use, daily patrolling and picking is often the only way to gather enough for sharing with friends and neighbors.

This past spring's cool, wet weather was ideal for *Vaccinium corymbosum*. The bushes bore blossoms in profusion; fat bumblebees, big as my great toe, worked at the miniature Japanese-lantern-shaped blooms from dawn until twilight. Fruit clusters, as I write, hang in clumps that a week ago were pale green, but now glow reddish-pink. Their color will soon deepen to purple and, finally, turn bluer than an August sky.

Without leaving the premises (if blue jays, robins, quail and chipmunks don't beat me to it), I shall gather several quarts before Labor Day. Not every berry in a cluster will ripen at the same time, so I'll have a good three weeks of picking before all are gone.

Even if they all ripened at once, I'd pick all I could find;

blueberries freeze well. Wash and then pick over, discarding stem ends and imperfect fruit. Drain and spread on a flat metal pan and pop in the freezer. As soon as they form tiny blue nuggets of ice, transfer them to plastic pint freezer containers to save a taste of summer for next December.

No matter how good blueberries taste in mid-winter, frozen ones can't measure up to fresh fruit. The Lovells enjoy a saucerful, laced with cream (or even milk), with only a dusting of sugar. We also savor them in muffins at breakfast, in pies after Sunday dinners, and mixed with other fruits of the season. Cantaloupe quarters or fresh peach halves with their "cockpits" filled with blueberries need no further adornment. Pretty too.

Blueberry cake may be made with fresh, frozen, or even canned berries, and is delicious hot or cold with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

## BLUEBERRY CAKE

2½ C. flour	1 C. sugar
2½ t. baking powder	1 egg, unbeaten
½ t. salt	½ C. milk
½ C. butter or oleo	1 pint (2 C.) blueberries

Measure flour onto a square of waxed paper and add salt and baking powder. In a medium-sized bowl, cream butter and sugar, add egg and beat thoroughly. Slide dry ingredients into a flour sifter and sift into batter, adding alternately with milk. Mix well only until smooth. Fold in berries and turn into a greased 9" square baking tin. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes or until center tests done and top is golden.

An old-fashioned favorite that Aunt Olivia often made as a special treat for me or as reward for picking berries is Steamed Blueberry Pudding with Sauce.

## STEAMED BLUEBERRY PUDDING

1 pt. blueberries	¼ t. ground cloves
1 C. water	1 T. molasses

Dumplings, or biscuit dough, for six servings

Combine blueberries, seasoning, water, and molasses in shallow saucepan with tight-fitting cover. Heat to boiling, drop dumplings on top, cover and steam at low heat for 30 minutes. Do not remove cover until done.

## SAUCE FOR PUDDING

Cream together 1C. sugar and ½ stick butter (or margarine) until fluffy. Serve a small scoopful of sauce with each portion of pudding.

Blueberry pie is something else. Some cooks use only a top crust "because the bottom crust is always soggy," but for proper blueberry pie, two crusts are as necessary as are fresh berries.

If you're one who believes the bottom crust must always get soggy, next time try these suggestions. After preparing a rich, short, pie dough, using ice water when mixing flour and shortening and liquid, handle as little as possible. Wrap dough ball in sheet-plastic and refrigerate while you wash and pick over the berries. Preheat oven to 375° and choose a good deep pie plate. Before removing pie dough from the fridge, mix together a cup of sugar and one heaping tablespoon of flour.

Roll out your bottom crust no thinner than 1/16th of an inch. Place it in the pie plate and sprinkle with about half the flour and sugar mixture. Fill the plate half-full of berries. Sprinkle a quarter cup of the flour and sugar mixture on the first layer of berries; repeat with a second layer, finishing off with the remaining sugar and flour.

Before flapping on the top crust, dot the fruit with ten or twelve bits of butter, each one about ¼ teaspoonful. Now the top crust. Don't forget to slash a few holes in it so steam and lovely blue juices can bubble out.

Crimp the crusts together all around, and brush the surface with fingertips dipped in a little cold milk. Bake an hour until golden brown.

Hint: If the edges of the crust brown too fast, rip a long strip of clean old sheeting to a width of 2 inches, dip in water, and squeeze dry. Gently wrap the pie plate's circumference, covering just the crimped edge of the crust. Remove and discard the strip 10 minutes before taking the pie from the oven.

If you need cream or ice cream with this blueberry pie, you're a gourmand, not a gourmet. Each forkful brings flavors of spring rains and summer sunshine in a blend that makes picking blueberries worth braving the bull briars and mosquito bites that are but part of the challenge.