

## **BLUEBERRIES AND CRANBERRIES – JERSEY FAVORITES FOR CENTURIES**

Cranberries and blueberries once grew wild in the Pine Barrens and along the barrier islands. The Lenni Lenape Indians picked the berries, using them for food and dyes. So did early settlers. Today both are big business in New Jersey.

Blueberries will grow in sand but prefers some humus. They withstand heat and drought. Delicious fruit follows white spring flowers. The only problem is beating the crafty bird population to the bushes. In the fall the leaves turn scarlet/ red. Bushes can be grown at home as ornamentals or for the berries.

Cranberries used to be found in the sand dunes or near fresh water ponds. In the Pine Barrens they grew wild, liking the sandy acid soil. They were picked with a multi-fingered scoop, pulling off the fruit (and, unfortunately, a lot of tiny leaves).

Blueberry farms and cranberry bogs are found throughout the Pine Barrens. Unlike centuries ago when fruit was available for the taking, today's harvest involves planting, fertilizing, spraying, and special machinery. Local stands abound with fresh blueberries each summer. Cranberries bogs are flooded late each summer, "beaten," and the light berries rise to the surface where they are easily removed.

Fresh blueberries (June/July) and cranberries (end of September – November) are Jersey favorites. Both can be frozen as is and retrieved for special recipes and occasions.