



# Down On The Farm!

## Blueberries

Blueberries are a fruit that has been around for thousands of years. They are one of Native America's perennials - meaning they regrow every year. Blueberries were once called "star berries" because of the star-shaped formation on their skin that is left from the flower that formed the fruit. There are more than 50 species of blueberries grown!

Long ago, explorers made a note about wild blueberries they discovered on their explorations. Lewis and Clark found that Native Americans in the Northwest Territory smoked wild blueberries to preserve them for the winter months. Early settlers loved the fruit as a staple ingredient in foods and medicines. They ate them fresh off the bush, added them to soups, stews and many other foods.

North America (the U.S. and Canada) are the world's leading blueberry producers and account for over 90% of world production at this time. More than 200 million pounds of blueberries are grown every year in North America. In fact, July is National Blueberry Month!

Michigan grows 32% of the blueberries in the United States! Michigan offers the right climate and acidic soil to grow the blueberries. But when you plant - you may have to wait! Blueberries produce in the warmer months and take two to four years to start bearing fruit!! The Michigan harvest season normally runs from late June through October.

Wild blueberries grow on bushes that grow close to the ground. Cultivated blueberries grow on taller bushes. Cultivated blueberry plants are grown on farms across the United States. High bush blueberry plants grow quickly and produce many berries. They grow best in moist, well-drained, acidic soils. Rabbiteye blueberries produce a similar type of blueberry but, they grow even faster than the high bush species.

Blueberries grow in clusters on the bush, but they don't all ripen at the same time. It takes about two to five weeks for blueberries to ripen on the bush. Blueberries are first picked by hand to gather the best of the early fruit. Later, if the fruit is to be mechanically harvested, a harvesting machine goes through the field and gently shakes each bush so only the ripe blueberries drop off.

Although they're called "blue" berries, blueberries grow in a variety of shades from light blue to dark purple. They get their blue color from anthocyanins, which are substances that may reduce risk of heart dis-



ease in humans. Blueberries are a good source of Vitamin C and Vitamin K.

The Spanish word for blueberry is arandano, the French word is myrtille, the Italian word is il mirtillo and the German word is heidelbeere!

### Blueberry Crisp

- 6 cups fresh blueberries, washed
- 1/4 cup instant tapioca
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup butter, melted
- 2/3 cup light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar

Preheat the oven to 350°. Combine the blueberries, tapioca and lemon juice in a large casserole dish. Mix them well and let it stand for at least 15 minutes. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining ingredients. Smooth the mixture over top of the berries, covering them completely. Bake for 45 minutes.