



Maine's Wild Blueberry

Maine's 44,000 acres of wild blueberries grow naturally in fields and barrens that stretch from the Downeast coast to the state's southwest corner.

Crystal Spring Farm's Unique Blueberry Habitat

The Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust's Crystal Spring Farm is home to a rare natural community, called the "Little Bluestem - Blueberry Sandplain Grassland." This is an area where blueberries grow wild.

Once common along the northeastern coast, development and changing land uses has all but eliminated this unique biome. The Maine Natural Areas Program lists this habitat as "critically imperiled."

The unique habitat is a product of geologic history and human actions. The sand and gravel deposited by melting glaciers at the end of the last ice age created soil here that does not hold water well and contains few nutrients. Sandplains are also highly fire-prone and have been maintained by fire for thousands of years, probably most often intentionally by humans: both Native Americans and European settlers used fire deliberately as a way to promote blueberry production. Together fire and soil constraints limit what species can grow here.

Poverty oatgrass, little bluestem, woodland sedge, northern blazing star, and blueberry are all plants highly adapted to this place. The community provides nesting habitat for several rare, ground nesting, grassland birds including the grasshopper sparrow and upland sandpiper, and habitat for a rare snake, the northern black racer.

Without fire, this habitat is in danger of disappearing from the land along with the robust blueberry production. To that end, the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust works with the local fire department and Maine Forest Service to undertake periodic prescribed burns of the sandplain.



Grasshopper Sparrow

Wild blueberries hold a special place in Maine's agricultural history — one that goes back centuries to Maine's Native Americans. Native Americans were the first to use the tiny blue berries, both fresh and dried, for their flavor, nutrition and healing qualities but it was not until the 1840's that wild blueberries were first harvested commercially.

Brunswick has been an important blueberry harvesting area for that long as well. For hundreds of years, both Native Americans and people of European decent flocked here by the thousands during blueberry harvest time. Into the 1940s the harvest was important to many, and many people came to camp in the "barrens" each year to harvest the berries.

Crystal Spring Farm and the adjacent property are home to an approximately 100-acre blueberry barren, or Little Bluestem - Blueberry Sandplain Grassland. Of this acreage, 22-acres are permanently protected by the Land Trust, and open to the public for picking. The remaining 80 or so are maintained organically and harvested by the farmer at Crystal Spring Farm – these are the berries you are eating today.

Blueberry Facts:

- Maine provides over 90% of the wild blueberry harvest in the US – with most of that coming from Washington County.
- The health benefits of blueberries include **protection against memory loss**, decreasing risk of heart disease, promoting a healthy complexion, and reduce risk of cancer
- Cows love blueberries! Vaccinium, the genus, comes from Vacca which means 'cow' in Latin.
- Abijah Tabbut invented the blueberry rake in 1883. The mechanical harvested was invented in the late 1960s, though hand-raking will always have its place - due in large part to the hilly and rocky terrain of many productive blueberry patches.
- Only 1% of wild blueberries are sold fresh.

