

## **GEHR Watershed Minute #50**

### **Blueberries: (225 words)**

True wild blueberries are flowering shrubs that occur naturally only in eastern and north-central North America. They vary in size from 4 inches tall to 13 feet tall. The smaller wild species are known as "lowbush blueberries" and the larger cultivated species as "highbush blueberries". The flowers are bell-shaped, white, pale pink or red.

The fruit is a false berry with a flared crown at the end. First they are pale greenish, then reddish-purple, and finally indigo when ripe. They have a sweet taste when mature, with variable acidity. Blueberry bushes typically bear fruit from May through June. Blueberries are sold fresh or processed as individually quick frozen fruit, purée, juice, or dried berries which in turn may be used in a variety of consumer goods such as jellies, jams, pies, muffins, snack foods, and cereals.

One of the most important commercial blueberry breeding programs in the world was in Chatsworth New Jersey in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, where Elizabeth White offered wild pickers cash for large-fruited wild blueberry plants that were cultivate for future generations.

Thousands of acres of blueberries are commercially cultivated in our watershed, with the Hammonton area in Atlantic County accounting for 80% of New Jersey's blueberry production. The Atlantic Blueberry Company in Hammonton and Hamilton Townships is one of the largest producers of blueberries in the world.