

Searching for the Attractive Qualities of Blueberries: Enjoying the Beauty of the Flowers and Leaves, Growing Plants, Taste of the Fruits, and Good Health®

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Blueberry plants (*Vaccinium*) were first brought to Japan from U.S.A. in 1951. Commercial blueberry culture progressed very slowly with only 10 ha planted by 1980. However, blueberry culture has increased rapidly over the last 10 years. It is estimated that the blueberry growing area will be to about 850 ha and about 2,000 tons of fruit will be produced in 2008. The state of expansion of the blueberry industry in Japan can be attributed to both the blueberry plant itself and the fruits which have all the qualities of new fields of agriculture in the 21st century, “growing/raising,” “marketing/processing,” “environment/preservation,” “health/welfare,” and “sightseeing/recreation.”

I investigated three topics: (1) breeding of cultivated blueberry, (2) blueberry culture in Japan, and (3) attractive qualities of blueberries.

In the first chapter of the breeding of cultivated blueberry, I outlined the classification of blueberries, the domestication of wild blueberry plants, and the types of blueberries.

In the second chapter of the blueberry culture in Japan, I summarized the growing areas and regions, production volume of fruits, and fruits consumption in Japan.

In the third chapter of the attractive forces of blueberries, I introduced the pleasure of the beautiful flowers and leaves, growing plants, the taste of fruits, and their good health. Especially in the section on the plant growing in the third chapter, I commented on the characteristics of blueberry plants and fruits, the cultivar selection, adequate cultural methods, and methods to control the quality of fruits. In the section on good health, I explained the mineral, vitamin, and dietary fiber in nutritional value, “good for vision” functionality of anthocyanins, and antioxidant activity of blueberry fruits. In addition, I explained a superior health functionality, anti-cancer activity, cardiovascular protection, and neurological function.

In 2 or 3 years the blueberry growing area in Japan will increase to about 1,000 ha, and production volume will be increased to about 3,000–4,000 tons. Further, the total of blueberry fruit consumption in the country will be increased to about 20,000 tons (including the low bush blueberry imported from U.S.A. and Canada) because Japanese consumers desire for healthful food and good taste.

In the future: freshness, large size, good taste, safety, natural, healing, and healthy will be important key words associated with blueberry production in Japan.