

Anne Arundel's Cranberry Bogs

They're Not as Common as They Used to Be, but They're Still Producing

By Joan Wolle

TO John Pumphrey, of Green Haven, an old-fashioned Christmas dinner means turkey served with cranberry sauce made from the berries he picked in a nearby bog in Anne Arundel county.

Although the berries are fewer than when he was a boy, once again on his seventy-third Christmas Mr. Pumphrey had Maryland-grown cranberries for dinner.

"Home-preserved cranberry sauce has been part of my Christmas meal since I was a little boy," he says. "My sisters and brothers and I used to go out and pick the berries, and Mother canned them or made pie.

"Most people don't realize that cranberries grow in Maryland, but years ago we used to get them by the bucketful. Now I'm lucky to get a couple of quarts."

Most of the cranberries housewives buy come from Massachusetts, the most important center of cranberry culture, or from New Jersey or Wisconsin. Only a few of the older Maryland residents know about the wild cranberry bogs found in Anne Arundel county.

THERE aren't many of the old-timers around any more," Mr. Pumphrey remarks. "Most of the cranberry pickers have either passed away or have long since moved somewhere else."

While most of the "picking spots" of his boyhood are no longer the sites of cranberry bogs, Mr. Pumphrey is still able to find a few places. His favorite bog is on Fork Creek, part of the Severn River, in an area which was a sand mine years ago.

"Cranberries like sandy soil," he says, "and maybe that's why they are found in Anne Arundel county."

To go cranberry hunting, Mr. Pumphrey advises wearing high-top boots because the bushes are always found in marshes. "And you've got to be careful not to step in muskrat holes," he cautions.

The only other equipment for a "cranberry expedition" is a pot or jar to put the berries in. "You don't need a bucket any more; there aren't that many berries."

MR. PUMPHREY handpicks the berries—in the large cranberry bogs in Massachusetts power machines are used.

"One advantage to cranberry picking over other berry gathering is that there are no stickers or briars on the bushes," this picker comments.

It is often necessary to walk through woods, underbrush and briars to get to the head of a body of water where there is a bog and a small patch of berries, he says.

"They are difficult to detect because they grow on a trailing vine, are not much higher than 6 inches, and usually surrounded by a lot of underbrush. They are generally found in soil which is brackish.

"Anne Arundel county cranberries ripen around the latter part of October and last until the middle of November, or until a severe frost hits them and makes them soft."

AFTER picking the berries, Mr. Pumphrey, who lives alone and does all his own cooking, usually preserves them by making sauce.

The wild berry is distinguishable only in the most minute details from the cultivated variety, cranberry authorities say. The cultivated "jersey," which is standard in New Jersey, is merely the native wild cranberry given good care. The differences are in the season of ripening,



Wild cranberries, today an uncommon find in Maryland, are picked in an Anne Arundel county bog by John Pumphrey, of Green Haven, upper photo. Lower, Mr. Pumphrey himself makes preserves of his fruit.

the size of the berry, the precise shade of color, the yield and the susceptibility to diseases.

No efforts to cultivate the berry commercially have ever been made in Maryland, so far as known, but it is conceivable that this would succeed, Mr. Pumphrey thinks.

Indian legends trace the cranberry back to about the year 1000. The early colonists learned of the fruit from the Indians, who prepared a dish by pounding yellow corn to corn meal, boiling it to mush, stirring in generous portions of cranberries and sweetening it with maple syrup.

It is probable, according to historians, that for many Indian tribes the cranberry was the chief source of Vitamin C in winter, protecting them from scurvy, the chief cause of the high mortality of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1620.

There is little doubt that the Pilgrims, who found cranberries

on the Cape Cod Peninsula, served them with wild turkey at Thanksgiving and Christmas. And so the American custom of cranberry sauce with turkey dinner began.

Commercial culture of the native fruit was begun about 1846 by Edward Thatcher, of Yarmouth.

A widower, Mr. Pumphrey, who used to build homes and dig wells when he was younger, lives alone in a one-room trailer on his daughter's place on Catherine avenue in Green Haven. He has three children and four grandchildren, but he is still the only "cranberry picker" in the family.

IT is not only cranberries that Mr. Pumphrey takes a fancy to picking. He also gathers blueberries, blackberries, and any other kind of wild fruit he can find near his home.

Mr. Pumphrey explains that he learned his home-making arts when he was a little boy. "My mother taught me how to cook and how to preserve as well as how to sew," he remarks.

After friends and relatives see Mr. Pumphrey's appetizing jars of cranberry sauce, there are seldom many left for him, but he always manages to put away a few jars for "a real old-fashioned Christmas dinner."

