



## Get your buckets and baskets ready | THIS SEASON

BY *Laura Jean Whitcomb*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Jim Block*

Rows of bushes, many standing 10 to 12 feet tall, stretch as far as the eye can see. Clusters of delicate berries weigh down branches, but there are dozens of people armed with buckets, baskets and containers of all types ready to lighten the load. This is what Mary and Wilmer “Bill” Brownell envisioned almost 30 years ago when they planted their first blueberry bushes in 1967.

“When my husband and I first started thinking about planting something, there was a lot of talk about grapes. Bill went to a couple extension meetings about making wine in New Hampshire,” says Mary. “But we thought it over and he knew what grows here and knew what wildlife is here. Bill didn’t think grapes were the thing, and we decided on the blueberries.”

The Brownells, owners of the Aqua Tree Farm in Danbury, planted a few 1-year-old bushes. Then 100 more in 1968, then a couple hundred every two

or three years, eventually ending up with about 1,500 bushes in the 1970s. “Blueberry bushes grow very slow,” Mary says. “It was about 10 to 12 years before we had enough for people to come pick.”

Today, Aqua Tree Farm offers 10 acres of blueberries: Seven acres of cultivated berries and three acres of wild and half-wild berries. At the Wilmot Farmers’ Market, shoppers were pleased to see Mary’s wild (also called lowbush) berries — a variety with a chewy, dense texture and deep flavor. (If you eat enough, they will turn your teeth blue.) “Some people do like the smaller berries for pancakes and muffins,” says Mary.

Although Bill died three years ago, Mary, 82, with the help of her daughter-in-law, still offers pick-your-own blueberries to the public every season. Last year was a banner year — people picked and purchased 2¾ tons of the disease-fighting, age-proofing fruit.



“It was the best summer we’ve had in a long time,” she says. “Some people came at least four times to pick berries.”

Blueberry season runs from July (National Blueberry Month) to September. You can find the Aqua Tree Farm by taking North Road from Danbury Square, driving past the fire station and following the signs. The farm is typically open Thursday through Sunday, but call 768-3649 for hours and picking availability. 📍

