

BLUEBERRIES

Stewart Hendrickson

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About a month ago I was taking a walk with my daughter. My usual route is to go west, from my condo by the corner of 17th Ave and NW 59th St, to about 34th Ave, and north to about 68th St. That takes me into the Sunset Hill neighborhood, a beautiful area with many older houses. We were walking up a street with large stately homes above. One of the houses had a wide front yard with a retaining wall. In front of the wall were many bushes right by the sidewalk. They were loaded with blueberries.

It was a warm, sunny day, and we couldn't resist picking some berries as we walked by. They were big, luscious, and sweet. We were amazed to see so many free for the picking. My daughter said, "maybe we should bring a small carton the next time we walk by." I replied, "well, no, I don't think that would be very nice, but I'll remember this place the next time." No, I won't tell you which street.

A few weeks later I walked by again and the couple who lived there were harvesting a load of ripe blueberries. I mentioned how good they were when we passed earlier, and that we were tempted to bring a small carton with us the next time. They laughed and told me the berries were there long before they bought the house. They take good care of them and have a plentiful supply each year.

This reminds me of a time many years ago, perhaps the early 1970s. We were living in Minnesota and planned a trip around Lake Superior. The road along the north shore in Canada was recently upgraded. We were car camping and chose a nice campground on the Canadian side. We got there late in the afternoon just in time to fix dinner after setting up our tent. The next morning as we were getting ready for breakfast, we walked around the campsite and found an area loaded with ripe, luscious blueberries. We picked enough for breakfast and much more to eat later.

My dad grew up in western Wisconsin, just west of Black River Falls. He referred to blueberries as huckleberries. These names are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Blueberries are larger and sweeter, while huckleberries are smaller and more tart. The berries I ate in Sunset Hill were definitely blueberries, as were the ones we found in Canada. The size and sweet taste were distinctive.

My daughter told me that the blueberries she planted in her yard in the Bay Area, were not nearly as large and prolific as the ones we found here. Clearly, the soil and the climate make the difference.

Now it's time to buy some more blueberries for my breakfast. I don't see any growing by my condo.

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