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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



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Subject: "KNOW YOUR NATIVE FRUITS." Information from scientists of State agricultural experiment stations. Publication free while supply lasts: "The Native Papaw", Leaflet No. 179. Order from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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You have probably heard that the British nowadays are getting vitamin C from rose hips and black currants instead of from the oranges and other citrus fruits they imported before the war. Last summer British school children, boy scouts, girl guides, and women's groups gathered the harvest of little red rose hips from wild rose bushes all over the country. These fruits of roses are very rich in vitamin C, often 20 times as rich, the British report. So the sirup and jam they make from rose hips is doing its part in keeping the British people fit while their ships have no room to carry fruit from abroad. The black English currant, too, is making a good substitute for citrus fruit, since it also is rich in vitamin C.

The British, you see, are finding vitamin wealth in their "own backyards", as the saying goes. And that's a tip for us here in America, too. Wartime naturally brings delays and shortages of food shipments so every family should make the most of the food at hand--of home gardens and orchards and also of the wild fruits. Many of the wild native fruits that go to waste every year are as rich in food value as the familiar fruits selling in the stores. For years now plant scientists at State agricultural experiment stations have been urging Americans to use and grow these native fruits to provide more variety in home meals at little or no cost. Many of the delicious wild fruits of this country deserve to be cultivated and improved, the scientists believe.

The early settlers in this country used the wild fruits they found growing here; so did the Indians. In those days ships were not bringing in familiar fruits from abroad, so, like the British today, our ancestors made the most of the wild

fruits around them.

The first native American fruit described and praised by the early explorers was the persimmon. As far back as 1539 De Soto wrote about the food value of the persimmon. And Captain John Smith in early colonial days reported in England that the persimmon was like a plum with the flavor of an apricot. He wrote: "If the persimmon be not ripe, it will draw a man's mouth awrie with much torment, but when ripe it is as delicious as an apricock." Plant scientists believe the astringent puckering taste of the unripe fruit, described long ago by the Captain is one reason the persimmon has still not come into the wide popularity it deserves. The persimmon tree is a native of southeastern United States, but has been found as far north as Connecticut and Michigan and west through Iowa and Nebraska. It thrives in almost any soil from the sandy coast to the rocky soil of the mountains, and even on barren eroded ground where little else will grow. On open ground persimmon trees will grow as tall as 50 feet. They have beautiful dark green lustrous leaves and small white flowers. The fruit, shaped something like a plan, varies from pale yellow or orange to a deep red. The ripe fruit has flesh about as soft as baked apple or baked custard. Persimmons are excellent in cakes, custards, sherbets and puddings, and they are very high in food value, richer in calories than bananas, according to scientists at the New York State Experiment Station. Scientists at the Texas Station report that persimmons are as rich in vitamin C as oranges, grapefruit, and lemons.

Another native fruit that deserves more popularity is the American papaw (pawpaw), sometimes called the "Indiana banana." The papaw tree grows in the same parts of the country as the persimmon, and like the persimmon, has large glossy leaves which make it ornamental as well as useful. The flowers of the papaw are large and deep purple. The fruit is yellow and oval in shape--about 6 inches long and 3 inches wide. The flesh of the fruit is rich, highly perfumed, about as soft

as custard, and very hearty--high in calories and in protein. The papaw tree is hardy, will grow on any soil, and is rarely attacked by insects or disease, according to New York State scientists.

Beside these native tree fruits, the United States has many delicious and useful wild berries. In the Rocky Mountain region, the wild juneberry or serviceberry has been a favorite with the Indians from earliest times. The Indians eat these berries fresh in summer and dry them for winter. Juneberries look something like blueberries--about a half inch in diameter, purplish blue or black, and very sweet. New York State scientists have been experimenting with improved varieties recently and say juneberry bushes are easy to grow in any good soil and bear heavy crops every year. Juneberries are excellent in pie or dessert combined with some sour fruit like rhubarb or sour cherry. This year, when sugar has to stretch so far, wild berries with so much natural sweetness should be especially appreciated.

Another excellent native berry of the Rocky Mountains is the Buffalo berry--bright red, acid, about the size of a small currant, and very delicious for sauce, preserves, jelly, and jam. The pioneers in the West ate sauce of these tart red berries with their Buffalo meat. The bush of the Buffalo berry has silvery gray foliage, is very hardy and will grow in many different soils and locations.

A small sweet eastern berry that was a great favorite with old-time housewives is the elderberry, often used still for pies and wine. This is another very sweet fruit. The elderberry bush is handsome in early summer with its great masses of white flowers and again in the fall with heavy clusters of dark red fruit.

Then there's the wild high-bush cranberry of the Great plains, a favorite for jelly because it is so rich in pectin and acid.

Another native fruit of the Great Plains is the western sand cherry--a black colored berry about a half inch or an inch in diameter--both sweet and puckering--good for sauce, pie, jam and jelly, and easy to grow in poor sandy soil.

All these native fruits have been under study at various State experiment stations. And every one of them, the scientists report, deserves more attention and use. In times like these American housewives will be wise to get acquainted with their native wild fruits.

