



Fresh Market Strawberry Bulletin

July 7, 2016

Another round of Day Neutrals

With the rainy weather downturn comes the usual fresh market quality problems. Slugs and fruit rot enjoy this weather which adds to the usual line up of pests at this time of year. Growing under hoops is more appealing during these weather events, though high recent thrips populations under hoops adds another growing challenge.

Day Neutral Strawberries in the PNW: Regional Growing Differences



This week, researchers from Oregon, Washington and British Columbia share their opinions about regional differences in growing day neutral strawberries.

Oregon: Bernadine Strik, OSU Berry Crops Professor, Berry Research Program Leader (North Willamette Research and Extension Center)

The important thing to say is that we haven't done a lot of research on plant types and ideal growing times, and it's necessary to do this research by region. My guess is that if growers would plant in autumn

(early-mid August to September 1st), then that would allow plants to have some growth before winter sets in. There's not growth through the winter with our climate. With autumn planting, you're getting an early crop- earlier than if you planted in spring. That might offer an advantage seasonality-wise.

With our gentle climate, our growers have seen that they don't need to remove the first flower trusses. It's a lot of labor without much benefit.

Not many nurseries offer plugs, so growers can't easily get them. They are also more expensive than other forms of the plant, so we need to find out if the added initial cost pays off later.

In other regions, the time of year planted seems to help determine what form of the plant is best suited for planting, but this hasn't been tested in Oregon. The variety you use will also probably make a difference. We need to know how soon different varieties go dormant and what conditions are ideal for them.

One difficulty in growing day neutrals in Oregon is that we need to find varieties that offer advantages compared to the varieties that are already being used and are already adapted to our climate. We also need to work on production systems and minimizing labor costs, such as handling blossoming, de-running, and picking efficiency. A huge need is that we have to develop nutrient and fertilizer standards that are adapted to our region.

Flavor, size, shelf life and a good fruit to leaf ratio (for good picking efficiency) are some of the main breeding attributes we look for when choosing the best day neutral selections for Oregon.

British Columbia: Tom Baumann, Director of the Pacific Berry Resource Centre & UFV's Ag Dept. Coordinator

In B.C., we're solely using runners, but I'd prefer plugs because we can be sure they've been grown soil-free, which means avoiding soil-borne diseases.

I'd like to see Fall plantings go in because that would make an early harvest and the plants would have time to establish.

Right now our growers only know how to do frozen plants, so they'd really need to be brought up to date on other plantings, which they'd probably be open to learning.

At this point, the main difficulty in growing day neutrals in BC is that there isn't fumigation going on. Another problem is dealing with new diseases that we haven't experienced before. Verticillium is up and coming because of the dry, hot year we had last year, which Verticillium loves. We're normally used to seeing Phytophthora Root Rot, but because of the strange weather, other things are popping up. We are also dealing with pests like Lygus and Thrips.

Another issue is that people are lax in taking the plant runners off. They don't take them off at the right time, and they take too long to do it, which drives labor costs up. People also need to be taking off the first two sets of flowers so that the plants can establish. This is a difference between Oregon and B.C. because of our different climates. In B.C., not removing the first blooms would make the plant remain small throughout the growing season.

Our desired breeding attributes are shelf life, flavor, and pest resistance. We want some of the Albion attributes. Also, it's important to find more fruiting consistency. We need our day neutrals to have a strong, steady fruit supply instead of fruiting in bursts.

Washington: Wendy Hoashi-Erhardt, Scientific Assistant (WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center)

There have been a couple of studies that show planting plugs in the fall is the best option. However, there are not many suppliers who provide plugs, and they are expensive relative to bare root plants. In general, most people are planting bare roots in the spring. In order to get a spring crop, some growers are trying to hold the bare roots over for a fall planting, but this can be tricky because after being in storage for 8-9 months, the plants have started using their carbohydrate reserves and won't be as vigorous.

If plug plants were more available and less expensive, people would probably be comfortable with going to fall planting, which means the plants wouldn't be in the field as long and growers could get an early spring crop. It's a matter of nurseries catching up with day neutral practices that are ideal for the area.

Right now, getting fruit in the cooler quickly is one of the hurdles of growing day neutrals. This is especially true with smaller producers or those who are trying to build up their strawberry production. Another difficulty with day neutrals is that their long season can present a lot of pest problems. This includes Lygus, SWD, Thrips, and Powdery Mildew, which aren't pests that growers with June bearing plants really have to deal with.

One definite thing we're looking for in terms of day neutral breeding attributes is a plant architecture that

works well with a plasticulture growing system. We are also looking for consistent flowering. Albion and Seascape are some predominate day neutral varieties right now, but they have a mid-summer fruiting gap that we'd like to avoid. We're also looking for large, firm fruit with an intense, sweet flavor. Overall durability and resistance to root and foliar diseases are also important attributes.

Strawberry-related News

- [Wendy's offers summer berry salad, video with Church Brothers](#) (6/29, The Packer)
- [Drone payloads advance the possibilities](#) (6/30, Ag Professional)
- [Overview of the global strawberry market](#) (6/24, Fresh Plaza)

Archived Bulletins

- 05/26/2016 - [OSC Bulletin: Harvest Updates from Growers, 05-26-16](#)
- 05/12/2016 - [OSC Bulletin, PT. 2: Selling Your Fresh Market Strawberries, 05-12-16](#)
- 06/23/2016 - [OSC Bulletin 06-23-16: 2016 Strawberry Field Day](#)

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