Gourmet Berry News™

Catching Up

Spring is here and so is strawberry season. Overwintered plants are growing nicely. It's the season for trimming out dead leaves and applying fertilizer. We are seeing flowers on plants that are in the cold frame.

A lot is happening here from shipping to transitioning to a new ecommerce platform.

Shopping Cart Changes

A lot of changes has come to our sites over the last month. We are now phasing out our Zencart stores due to costs and future requirements for securing credit card information (called PCI Compliance) and the new Google deadline for mobile friendly rankings. Don't let anyone tell you that an open source (free) shopping cart is free. The plant site (www.thestrawberrystore.com/buyplants) is not longer taking orders. The seeds store (www.strawberryseedstore.com/buyseeds) is taking orders but only until mid summer. All orders are now being taken on a number of sites using a cloud based shopping cart named Ecwid (www.ecwid.com) which stands for ecommerce widget.

These changes make it difficult on customers but they are starting to make our lives easier. No more version updates. All of that is being taken care of. We

can now focus on the business, the products and more importantly, customer service. We are even testing a live chat system in an effort to improve information flow and answer questions in a timely manner.

We created a new store for selling plants and plugs at www.alpinestrawberryplants.com/store. It calculates shipping cost based on rates and weights from the USPS.

Strawberry Research

I don't know if you're aware of the hybrid strawberry research being conducted at the University of Arizona. They are funded by the Walmart grant. Their goal is to make off season strawberries more available by growing in protected environments like high tunnels and greenhouses. I'm fascinated by their research and have watched a number of the videos that they produced.

Their pictures remind me of my own research on growing strawberries in a greenhouse over 30 years ago. They have more money to do their research and have the latest equipment. Here are some links.
[Hydroponic Strawberry Information Website](#)

Another research effort on LED technology can be found at [Developing LED Lighting Technologies .....](#)

While the basic information can be applied to gourmet types of strawberries, there are differences in growth habits, marketing and post harvest care. If you're interested in growing strawberries in protected environments the links will be a great resource to get you started.

Plan for Fall Planting

I know, most of you haven't even planted for spring yet. Because plugs take 10 weeks we are already planning for fall planting. We feel that the fall is the perfect time to plant strawberries. They establish even during fairly cold periods

in the fall and when spring comes they are already established and ready to start growing and producing fruit.

We recommend planting at least 4 to 6 weeks before cold weather sets in. This gives the plants time to acclimate to local conditions and establish a root system that will sustain them through winter.

After a couple of hard frosts the plants will need to be mulched in colder zones. The amount of mulch depends on your local winter environment. Check with local county extension personnel for their local recommendations.

We are now selling plants on a special site at Alpine Strawberry Plants. This site was recently setup separate from the seed site to take advantage of carrier calculated shipping. It will save you some money on shipping over the other sites. We have to use table rates at the other sites which are not as accurate.

Previous newsletters can be viewed at Gourmet Berry News

Coupons and Discounts

Coupons are now much simpler. There will be no coupons for www.strawberryseedstore.com/buyseeds. The discount for subscribing to the newsletter will continue working as long as the site is operational.

The codes below will work in any of our Ecwid stores that sell seeds. We encourage customers to use this site, The Strawberry Store. The code is 4WGT4AR56CF8   . The discount is 10%. The minimum order is $15 and the code is valid for a single use through the end of June.

The code for purchasing plants and plugs at **Alpine Strawberry Plants** is 9YO43YNQJLIC   the discount is for 10%. It is good through the end of June and other than a single use per customer there are no other restrictions.

Previous newsletters can be viewed at Gourmet Berry News, The Strawberry Store **and at** Alpine Strawberry Plants

More Seed Saving Tips

Seed saving season is upon us. Recently we transplanted plugs to the containers that we use for our seed crops. We primarily use Bato buckets and Roottrapper II's (www.rootmaker.com). Both have advantages and disadvantages. The Bato's have a slight advantage with their built in reservoir. This is important in the summer when it is very hot. Overall, we think the Roottrapper II's are the best container for our purposes.

Early in the season it is important to fertilize properly and trim off dead material from overwintered plants. We use early season biological fungicide applications while the plants are small. We only use biological types that in general have no curative properties, only protective.

We also use nematodes early in the season to get rid of any fungus gnat populations that are starting. Because the soil is not drying out quickly with small plants the fungus gnats populations can explode and cause severe root damage.

The saving part of seed saving is the goal, but there are a lot of things that must be done before we get to "saving".

Another part of this process is pollination. We isolate the crops to insure purity. We have already released mason bees into the enclosures. Because there are only a few flowers indoors so far we are growing various early blooming plants to keep the mason bees going. Borage and Phacelia are two of the plants we provide the bees. We also have some blooming herbs that will keep the bees happy temporarily. When the strawberries are in full bloom we will remove these supplemental plants. We want the bees to focus on the strawberries.

Previous newsletters can be viewed at Gourmet Berry News

Did You Know ...... ?

This section is devoted to little tidbits, current trends or events, about strawberries. It may or may not appear in all future newsletters.

   One of the most common questions I receive is about sowing multiple seeds per cell or container. I realize that most are trying to get as many plants as possible from seeds that seem to be expensive. Before you thin out the extra seeds consider this. I recommend sowing a "pinch" of seed to the commercial customers that I deal with. Does this sound like a waste?
   It's not a waste. Multiple plants per cell or pot can require extra diligence to keep them from drying out but the positive effect is that you will have more flower stalks in the first year. The larger clump will produce more fruit. It likely won't make a lot of difference in the second year but we're all worried about the here and now.
   As second thought when thinking about waste is whether to remove blooms in the first year or not. I think it's a good idea to remove blossoms from June bearing hybrids that are planted in spring. They need to establish so they can produce future crops. Same is likely true for day neutral hybrids. But,I don't think it's necessary to remove blossoms from spring planted alpines. The fruit load the first spring is limited by the size of the clump as mentioned above. Removing blossoms in my opinion just deprives you of the limited fruit. The plants grow quickly anyhow. I do remove blossoms from fall planted alpines so they can establish before harsh weather comes.

Will reconnect with you next Month. Previous newsletters can be viewed at Gourmet Berry News and on our main sites.

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