

## Growing Day Neutrals

at Farm to YOU

David Pike, 115 Mountain View Road, Farmington, Maine 04938-6407 : [dcpike@beeline-online.net](mailto:dcpike@beeline-online.net)

In Maine it is possible to have fresh strawberries from late May to late October by growing both summer-bearing and day neutral (DN) strawberries. For best yield, planting should be early May in this area. Plasticulture is preferred over matted row, as it reduces weeds and soil is warmer in the late season. Plant on crowned beds with drip tape buried at time of shaping and laying plastic. Bed size is best determined by equipment available. Option to broadcast dwarf perennial rye grass (living mulch) after the plastic is laid and the ends are dressed. Punch marks are made every 13 in. in plastic for plant location. Planting is done by hand with a planting tool, using dormant bare-root transplants. Grass is mowed, as needed, with mulching lawn mower. Remove early blossoms prior to mid-June to encourage crown development. Remove runners during growing season (to allow maximum plant development) and enlarge planting hole for better rooting of the branch crowns. Season extension is accomplished with floating row covers or overhead sprinklers as needed. At the end of the harvest season and after the plants go dormant cover the plants with 1.2 oz. floating row cover.

### LOW TUNNEL

Excessive rain storms late summer into the fall will cause a lot of unsaleable fruit that has to be culled out. To address this problem, I constructed a portable modular low tunnel using ¾ in. EMT tubing attached to thirty foot long, two inch diameter, irrigation pipes. Each thirty foot section weighed seventy pounds and was held down by ground augers. Six sections were placed end to end for a one hundred eighty foot low tunnel. Bungee cords were used to keep the plastic taut at all times, even in strong winds and during hot days. For foliar feeding, pesticide application and frost protection, tubing was attached to the ridge pole and drop-down misters were placed every five feet. For venting and harvesting the sides are rolled up. During pollination the plastic must be rolled up outwardly (to protect the pollinators) or inwardly prior to heavy rains. This system will take a lot of wind. However, if strong winds are anticipated, gather up and tie the plastic to the ridge pole.

### RENOVATION

I have been experimenting to get a second year from the life of a DN planting. I find that San Andreas is more winter hardy and out-produces Albion by approximately 50%. Clean debris after the snow melts and cover with floating row cover (for earlier harvest) and remove it at blossom time. This will provide an earlier crop by ten days to two weeks before summer-bearing varieties ripen. There will be a noticeable decline in new blossoms during this harvest time, but plants will re-invigorate after renovation. This is done while the summer-bearing strawberries are producing. The DN strawberries will start to set blossoms immediately and will be harvestable shortly after the summer-bearing season ends. After the plant sets out a few runners, cut these runners and stretch the plastic at the planting hole to promote branch crowns for larger fruit. This crop will peak late August or early September and produce into October.

On May 1, 2013, I planted 2500 San Andreas and Albion strawberry plants on 0.2 acres.

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Harvest for season 2013: (summer + fall)                        | 2500 quarts       |
| 2. Harvest for season 2014: (Spring=1200 quarts)(Fall=1800 quarts) | 3000 quarts       |
| 3. Harvest for Spring 2015:  | <u>800 quarts</u> |