

## **Strawberry Varieties for Today and Tomorrow**

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A person could easily find a thousand different strawberry varieties in the world today. In North America, there are over 100 varieties offered by over 40 different companies. In 2010, Nourse Farms will offer 25 varieties of June Bearing and 2 varieties of Everbearing/Day-neutrals. This menu offers growers from zones 3 to 8 an opportunity to produce June bearing strawberries for approximately 30 to 45 days and everbearing strawberries for 3 to 6 months. I will focus on our top ten sellers and four new releases for the New England states.

For forty years, I have had the privilege to hear about many peoples most and least favorite varieties. Opinions are as varied as the growers and the land they use. The good news is strawberries are the most popular berries for consumers. The bad news is growing conditions in the North East are very different from year to year. I suggest growers consider less than perfect backup varieties to split the risk of poor conditions. In difficult situations and extreme field conditions, many of our top ten sellers will perform poorly. That is why we offer substitutes and I will cover five of those.

As a consultant, I like to prescribe several options to growers looking for advice. My recommendations are based on the following criteria. What varieties do you like and why? This helps me suggest varieties that can compliment the existing program. Where do you live? The choices will be different for every zone and microclimate. How are you planning to sell the berries? Wholesale, retail and pick your own are very different venues. What is your soil type? Varieties can like heavier soils better than light soils and vice versa. Are you organic or conventional? A few varieties are better suited for organic. Do you have irrigation? Early varieties are more consistent with frost protection. Drip irrigation will help any variety reach higher production potentials. Some varieties shouldn't be considered without irrigation. What were the previous crops planted in the area you are considering? This is a very important question for several reasons. Many growers will try to plant back where strawberries have been produced for several years. Another reason is to find out what herbicides had been applied, many have plant back restrictions, and strawberries may fail to grow in previously treated soil.

The following list comprises our top ten sellers, five alternates, and four new releases. Please keep in mind that the top ten list represents almost 80% of our sales and the entire group represents 90% of sales. The other ten varieties we offer are alternatives for exceptionally difficult conditions.

**Jewel** – This variety sets the standard for wholesale, retail, and pick your own strawberries. I estimate that Jewel comprises 15-20% of June bearing production in North America. For some growers, it is the only variety they grow. Jewel can be difficult to renovate and will perform poorly with heavier rates of Sinbar herbicide.

**Darselect** – Nourse Farms has the exclusive rights to sell this variety in the U.S. Darselect is similar to Jewel in many ways. It has very high yield potential and a long harvest season. It is very susceptible to Leaf Scorch and demands preventative sprays throughout the growing season. Give this princess the attention she deserves and you'll be rewarded with large sweet berries.

**Seascape** – This is the most popular everbearing variety for commercial production, outside of California and Florida. Seascape will have exceptional performance in the cooler microclimates of the Great Lakes, Saint Lawrence Seaway, and the Atlantic coast. In warmer areas, drip irrigation can aid in the management of heat stress, helping this variety reach 75-80% of its production potential.

**Earliglow** – Considered one of the best tasting varieties, it is the most popular early season variety. Earliglow is vigorous, adapts to many growing conditions, and shows resistance to Red Stele. Its lower yield is mainly due to the small berries that develop after the third harvest. I believe there is an heirloom marketing opportunity here, growers should consider asking for higher prices and selling Earliglow in pints.

**AC Wendy** – This is the first early season variety that challenges Earliglow for flavor. It has a very high yield potential. The combination of higher yields and bigger berries through the entire harvest period makes Wendy very attractive. While initial results are very positive, I am concerned about its susceptibility to Leaf Scorch.

**Honeoye** – It is interesting how this variety has been a top ten seller since it was introduced, even though most growers will tell you how much they dislike the taste. While it will have off flavor in heavier soils during hot and dry periods, Honeoye is very consistent and forgiving. I will often joke: if you can't grow Honeoye, you should get out of the strawberry business.

**Cabot** – This is the largest berry that still tastes great. Cabot is not for beginners. The berries can be very soft, with many split king berries, and plants don't always produce enough runners. This variety has one of the highest yield potentials, but it needs extra water, magnesium and boron from bloom through harvest. With drip irrigation and early morning harvest, I feel it can compete with any late season variety.

**Allstar** – This variety produces a good crop of sweet berries in almost any soil. Its disease resistance and adaptability allows growers to produce berries in the most challenging conditions. If it were a little darker berry, it would be even more popular.

**Cavendish** – This variety will excel in cooler conditions, like this past season, with very high production. The heavy crop load combined with hot and dry conditions will produce half red berries. Irrigation is very important in reducing uneven ripening. Cavendish is resistant to both Red Stele and Verticillium.

**Eros** – Is another variety exclusive to Nourse Farms. It can produce above average yields late into the season. Eros, in my opinion, will perform better on heavier soils. On our very light soils, it is not as sweet. This has been one of our largest berries during the Fourth of July sales week.

Eros has Red Steele resistance with the trade off of a softer skin. Due to its lighter color, many growers pick this variety past maturity.

The next five varieties offer their own unique advantages. They are staple varieties for some, while being backup for others.

**Annapolis** – This is the earliest variety to ripen. Similar to Earliglow for vigor and disease resistance, it also loses its size after a few harvests.

**Brunswick** – This variety can go head to head with Honeoye in cooler climates. It does not have flavor issues in heavy soils.

**L'Amour** – This is a lower yielding variety during Honeoye season. The fruits are much firmer and taste good. L'Amour's advantage is leaf disease resistance.

**Clancy** – This variety has the same season as Cabot. The berries are very firm and it has leaf disease resistance. Clancy will runner more freely and is much easier to grow than Cabot.

**Ovation** – Vigorous, disease resistant, and with very large berries, Ovation is a fit for organic growers. It usually produces too many runners and is a low yielding variety.

New to our catalog for 2010, these four releases offer several advantages over existing selections.

**Galletta** – This variety was developed as an alternative to Sweet Charlie. It should ripen before Earliglow and have larger fruit size than Earliglow or Evangeline. Time will tell if Galletta will be winter hardy enough for zone 4.

**Daroyal** – Harvesting at the same time as Honeoye, this very good tasting variety is bright and shiny. Daroyal will be recognized for its size and great shape.

**AC Valley Sunset** – Trialed as KRS-10, this late season variety has great flavor and color. It ripens at the same time as Ovation. Leaf disease resistance and vigor are very good. The downside for many will be the soft skin, it could be softer than Cabot.

**Record** – This variety will ultimately replace Idea, it seems everything about it is better. There will not be many who are thrilled with its color and taste, but it will out produce most varieties.

Like many things in life, I have yet to find the perfect strawberry variety. However, there are many opportunities for growers who are willing to change their growing practices in order to help varieties overcome their limitations. It is important to understand that variety development is a long process, taking 5-10 years before release. If a variety does well in Europe, it must go through a two-year quarantine before it can be sold commercially in the U.S. Consequently, I would recommend taking a few years to fully evaluate any variety before making a final decision.