

# The Strawberry Store, LLC

## December 2010 Newsletter

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I wanted to get one final newsletter out before the end of the year. The first thing I wanted to mention is that plant shipping has slowed down due to the cold weather here in Delaware. Plants in the nursery were covered with straw in early December. We can still ship to warmer areas in the country but the vast majority of orders now coming in for plants will be pushed back to early March for the warmer climates. We ask that you let us know in the comments box when you order what your preferred shipping date is. Later in the newsletter we will talk about the spring shipping schedule. When seeds are ordered with plants the seeds will be sent out within a couple of days and the plant shipment will be delayed unless the customer makes a specific request.

### **Seed Sale**

We are now established with some very reliable seed suppliers along with our own seed production efforts. Because we are now buying seeds in large quantities we decided to have a gigantic seed sale which will run for most varieties until late January. Because we are selling in bulk quantities as well as seed packets we encourage you to order early. Bulk orders going offshore have increased significantly as well which will put pressure on our inventory. Don't miss out on this sale!!

### **New Seed Varieties**

If you haven't checked out our seed offerings lately it might be worthwhile to do that now. Because the business is named The Strawberry Store, we decided to start offering seed varieties other than alpine types. We are now offering several hybrid types grown from seed. We have steered away from the strictly ornamental types that produce little or no fruit or fruit that is not acceptable. See our blog for a discussion of these ornamental types. I think the new seed varieties will fit into the home gardener's garden and patio. Several are very adaptable to container growing and several make great hanging baskets. Order soon for hanging baskets that will be ready for Mother's Day.

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## Japanese Beetle Regulations

We completely reevaluated our shipping procedures that involve shipping to states where Japanese beetle is not present. These regulations are very complicated. Meeting the requirements involves making some very difficult decisions. One option for shipping plants to regulated states is to ship the plants bare root. Our current production does not lend itself to bare root. We have to wash the soilless mix off the roots which is very time intensive and requires a lot of water.

We are still working on procedures and are discussing contract growing with several growers. This is one option that has benefits to us and to our customers. The biggest benefit to you, the customer is that regional growing facilities will reduce shipping costs. We also envision more gourmet strawberry plants being available from local garden centers.

When we have all our ducks in a row in regard to Japanese beetle, we will update you. Until then rest assured that we are doing what it takes to make sure that Japanese beetles are not being introduced into areas that do not have them.

## Spring Shipping Schedule

We already have orders in hand for spring 2011 shipping. We published our 2011 shipping schedule. Our schedule is similar to the schedules of other companies that ship strawberry plants. It is based on gardening zone. A link to our schedule is <http://www.thestrawberrystore.com/ZoneShipping.pdf>. One thing to note is that the time period for shipping to each zone is rather wide. This will allow us the time we need to get our large numbers of orders and will allow for the early part of the time period for shipping to southern parts of a zone and later shipping to more northerly parts of a zone.

Customers who specify shipping dates on their orders can bypass this shipping schedule. We will make every effort to accommodate customer requests that come in after the order has been placed. Some customers have greenhouses or wish to grow plants indoors. We will schedule their orders ahead of others to the best of our ability.

We have removed the "ASAP" option for shipping plants from the shopping cart. I think there are a couple that were overlooked. Hopefully, I'll catch all of these before too long and remove them. Last spring was a mess because of this option. Customers who chose ASAP expected that the plants would be packed that day and that they would get

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them in 2-3 days (the priority mail time frame noted at checkout). I responded to way too many emails asking why their order was not delivered in two days. I can't afford that kind of time during the heaviest shipping season so we completely changed the procedure for scheduling shipments.

### **Starter Plants**

Starter plants have been a very popular category of products. Growing these plants has been a challenge due to our lack of facilities and the cost of winter heating. In addition, we chose to spend considerable extra effort packing the cell packs to insure safe delivery. Damaged shipments were nearly eliminated but the labor costs skyrocketed.

As mentioned earlier, we are working on regional production. The growers that we are talking to have greenhouse facilities which will reduce the challenges faced in growing starters. The increasing volume will enable us to consider lowering the prices. In fact, current pricing is lower than ever before for this group of plants. In-season pricing will increase so if you are interested in buying starters order early for the best pricing. Starters will also be available at wholesale prices for full trays.

In the past we offered up to a dozen varieties of starters. Our current plans are to limit the number of varieties that will be available. If our offerings don't include varieties that you might want, we take custom orders. Please contact us as early as possible to schedule custom orders. These orders will be seeded within a day or two of finalizing the order so order early. We suggest ordering at least 10 weeks or longer before you want to receive the order.

### **Gourmet Strawberries Blog**

This discussion relates to our blog at <http://blog.thestrawberrystore.com>. If you have visited the blog recently you probably were a bit surprised that you were required to subscribe. I wanted to explain why this was necessary. First, literally hundreds of users were spamming the blog. We saw as many as 125 spammers per day. They were hitting the blog to promote all sorts of self serving sites, products, etc. The Viagra ones were the most aggressive. It took hours a month to sort through all of this and I'm sure some legitimate users were innocently categorized as spam. Even the apps setup in the blog to catch spam couldn't keep up with the onslaught.

By requiring users to subscribe we have all but eliminated the spamming. Along with these changes to deal with spam, we added a plug-in to establish membership levels. Users can continue to subscribe for free, but now the option exists to pay for

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membership for premium content. The basic information about gourmet strawberries will be available for free, but premium content will require paid membership.

I have been trying for a long time to figure out how to release the data that has been developed over the last 20+ years. Research is expensive and I'm not a land grant institution that gets public funding for what I do. To be able to continue developing data on varieties, commercial production methods and other topics, some support is needed. This membership approach to a blog will allow me to continue to conduct trials. Those who are not interested in advanced methods can still get the basic information without cost. Commercial growers who need specific information but can't afford my consulting fees and expenses for me to travel to them, can pay for membership for this information.

It is going to take some time to get this premium content on the blog. It has taken years to develop but hopefully most of it will be online in 6 months or so. In addition, preliminary results of ongoing trials will be included at various membership levels. As a premium member you won't need to wait for multi season or multiyear trials to conclude before getting the results.

Please note the support level for the different membership levels. If you need information not yet added to the blog, we can get that information to you through email and/or phone support. Membership at the highest levels gives you direct access to me and my time, though still limited. It still may be necessary for me to travel to see you, but for most growers a relatively inexpensive membership can get you started or get you back on track. Why now take advantage of my many years experience in this field.

Finally, I thank you for your business. I wish you and your families a very Blessed Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Michael J. Wellik

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