

The Strawberry Store

2009 End of Year Newsletter



A lot is happening here at The Strawberry Store. We wanted to get off a final newsletter for the year. The first order of business is to thank all of our customers who have purchased from us this past year. You have made this a successful year for us and have helped us to fine tune our system and come up with labor saving methods. We appreciate the feedback we have received. It has been very helpful.

The first question on customer's minds recently has been whether we will increase prices for 2010. We do not anticipate a price increase.

Shipping costs continue to rise. We also pay shipping charges for supplies and have been very frustrated at times with shipping costs. We were placing an order online recently for film to cover some cold frames and cancelled the order when the shipping charge exceeded the cost of the film. We plan to continue shipping with the USPS which has offered the most economical prices for shipping that we have found. By the way, we just heard that UPS is increasing their prices by 5%. No other information is available from other carriers.

Our germination trials are finished and all seeds going out from now on will have the updated germination percentages included and will be marked as "packed for 2010". The

germination is very good. Most of the varieties being sold are in the 80+% range.

We would like to mention that alpines take 4 months (16 weeks) from seed to produce their first fruit. Keep this in mind when placing your seed order for 2010. As a rule of thumb, for zone 7, sowing seeds in early to mid January will produce fruit the first season. Earlier sowing is needed for warmer zones.

While talking about germination I wanted to mention a germination test of a different kind. One variety that was marginal last year (minimum standards for strawberry seed germination is 60%) served as an excellent way to test the effect of worm castings (vermicompost) on seed germination. The short story is that using vermicompost significantly increased seed germination in this replicated trial. We plan to make the specific information available very soon. See the section below for slideshow videos for more information.

Many have heard some of our story about vermicomposting. There's more! We recently built what is called an OSCAR Worm bin which started out with 10 lb (8 – 10K worms). It was necessary to increase our castings production to keep up with the business growth. This new bin is capable of processing up to 5 lb of garbage/trash per day. After only a month of operation we are already harvesting vermicompost. To date we have harvested 2 gallons of high quality castings. Since the worm population can double within 90 days we expect production to increase significantly. This new capability promises to allow us to use a higher percentage of vermicompost in growing all of our plants and will make it

possible to spray vermicompost tea more frequently to suppress insect and disease pests.

There are two other announcements about vermicomposting. We have launched a new ecommerce/information site at www.vermitec.com. This site will complement our current sites and offer products that we have tested. We are now offering worms and one type of bin for sale. Other products will be added soon. Second, we have launched research projects specifically involving various aspects of strawberry production and vermicompost.

Anyone who lives in the vicinity of Delaware is invited to attend the annual meeting of the Delaware Organic Food and Farming Association (DOFFA) in Dover on January 23rd. Please request a copy of the agenda. I'd be glad to send it to you. I have been asked to speak about vermicomposting and how it fits into strawberry production. I also will be part of a panel that will discuss extending crop seasons with high and low tunnels. We hope that the weather will cooperate. All of us who are members of this association look forward to this meeting.

As mentioned above, we are in the process of producing slideshow videos. We have purchased software to create slideshows that can be converted to a couple of video formats. We plan to submit these to YouTube and make them available to customers. The first project underway is "about us". Few if any pictures are available of our nursery or the operation. Some may not understand what we actually do other than selling seeds and plants. Tentative plans for a second video are underway. The second will be about alpine varieties and will

include a new chart that we are working on that will provide ratings on plant growth and fruit taste, among other things, for varieties that we currently offer. We hope these videos will stimulate feedback and cooperation with customers who are as interested as we are in growing “strawberries with taste”. These videos will also provide a vehicle to publicly release data that has been developed.

Alpine Quick Starts are still available. We shipped some to CA this morning. Customers in the warmer climates can continue ordering all winter. We will ship weather permitting – that is on our end. Even if the plants are dormant here we can still ship them. We have not had any issues even when shipping in the coldest weather. The plants are grown outdoors with mulch so they can take the weather. One thing to keep in mind about the non-running alpines is that they are day neutral ever bearing types. They do not need a cooling period to flower. They can go from cold here to warm climates and start growing and flowering with no problem.

We have decided to offer starter plants again in 2010. Look for them to be added to the shopping cart in early January. Prices will be the same. The difference will be that customers can order a single six pack along with other products to meet the minimum order. In the past we offered starters with a minimum of three six packs. This added flexibility has already been added to our ecommerce site.

We also urge customers to consider purchasing gift certificates that are now available online. This is a perfect gift for that

special friend or relative that wants to grow their own strawberries.

Finally, we are planning a facelift for the website. The shopping cart will continue with the same look. During the winter we hope to get this work done.

We hope that everyone has a terrific holiday season. We look forward to serving you again in 2010.