

The Strawberry Store Newsletter
by Michael Wellik

Strawberries Growing Everywhere

It's time for another Gourmet Berries Newsletter. A lot is going on even though spring is still two months away.

The title of this month's newsletter says it all. Our facilities are filled with strawberries in all stages of growth. And, our outdoor nursery is covered with snow. We received nearly 40" of snow from two large snowstorms that were only a couple of days apart. The snow has slowed down shipping of overwintering plants. We hope to get back to shipping them next week. The daytime temperatures get into the 30's so the snow doesn't melt too fast.

Some of the other news is about seeds and new varieties. First, we have found a commercial source of seeds from Europe for the European standard variety for fraises des bois (alpine strawberries). It is named 'Reine des Vallees' which translated from French means 'Queen of the Valleys'. We have been growing this variety for a year but due to limited seed supply we could offer it only as a premium priced plant. We now will be able to offer it shortly as seed.

The second part of the news about new varieties is also about 'Reine des Vallees'. The seed is pelletized. I had never before seen strawberry seed pelletized. The pellets are about 5 times the size of a strawberry seed. They are light green pellets that you can pick up with your fingers if you want to. I just seeded some with my vibrating seeder and absolutely love pelletized seed. It is going to be hard to go back to those tiny non-pelletized seeds. The down side is that the pelletizing process is not cheap so the seeds will be noticeably more expensive than non-pelletized seed. We hope to have plenty of inventory and have it added to the shopping cart by the first week of March.

The second seed related announcement is about another new French variety name 'Deesse des Vallees' which translated means 'Goddess of the Valleys'. This variety is a selection of 'Reine des Vallees' which is patented. It is NOT a hybrid, it's a selection. The patent holder says that the fruit is more "rustic" than its parentage and that the red fruit is a larger caliber than 'Reine des Vallees'. We have yet to test this variety or take pictures but are very excited to be able to offer it. I expect to receive the seed and make it available by mid March. The seed of this variety is also pelletized.

Other variety news is about a number of varieties that we have in a heated cold frame (is that redundant?) a number of new varieties that we will be testing this coming year. Three of the varieties are *Fragaria virginiana*. Two of the varieties are *F. moschata*, musk strawberries, and several more are heirloom hybrids including two white fruiting heirloom varieties.

We have added larger quantities of seeds to the shopping cart. For *F. vesca* 'Mignonette' we are offering 50, 500 and 1,000 seed packs for your convenience. We will be adding larger seed count packets for other varieties as we get larger and more consistent supplies. Some varieties will likely always be in

short supply. If they have interesting characteristics or show exceptional production, we will find sources or make a special effort to save the seeds ourselves.

Finally, I would like to mention several YouTube videos that were produced in the last month. Our YouTube channel is gourmetberries. A search for this channel will turn up videos about strawberries and about vermicomposting. The response has been unbelievable with hundred of views on some of the videos already. If you would like to see a particular subject done as a video, please send suggestions. We welcome your suggestions.

Well, that's enough for now. We hope your winter is warmer and less snow filled than ours. I know we'll all welcome the first warm days of spring. Until the next newsletter, keep dreaming about those tasty gourmet strawberries that will be welcome signs of spring.

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