

The Strawberry Picture in Southwestern Michigan

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The following paragraphs represent a summary of my own personal observations and those of my neighbors, in an attempt to give a picture of the strawberry variety situation in southwestern Michigan, as we see it.

The Benton Harbor market, in our area, encourages growers to bring in only two varieties—Premier and Robinson, although other good varieties are also purchased on this market. Buyers often come to us with orders specifically only for Premier and Robinson. We may have several crates of fine Fairlands and Blakemores which they could buy. Yet, we usually have to hunt up other buyers to take these varieties, perhaps at a price of one dollar less per crate, although their quality may even be superior to that of the Premiers or Robinsons.

We have decided, after only two years experience with Sparkle, that this variety makes a good processing berry. It is, however, unsatisfactory for the fresh market, because the fruit is hard to pick without leaving the caps on the plants.

Redrich, if picked for the fresh market, must be harvested while the tips are still green. If the berry is allowed to ripen so that the tip also colors, then the berry becomes an undesirable dark red, and buyer resistance increases.

Sparkle and Robinson, in combination, make a very attractive looking puree for ice cream flavoring, provided they are mixed in the ratio of one pound of Sparkle to three of Robinson.

Sparkle appears to be hardier and a more prolific plant bearer than almost any variety. It will grow on blow-sand, where even the Robinson could not exist.

I believe that the Robinson is more or less of a poor-land variety. Under such conditions it can be grown successfully with irrigation and a carefully worked out fertilizer program. When this variety is grown on very fertile soil it is quite apt to grow such a tremendous leaf surface that satisfactory pollination is prevented. From the standpoint of yield, both Robinson and Premier growers claim first place.

Catskill makes a good processing berry, but due to the fact that so many plants are infected with virus diseases and nematodes, very few growers have had satisfactory yields.

Fairland thrives well on red stele infested ground, processes well and sells next to Premier and Robinson on the fresh market. I would, therefore, place this berry along with Sparkle in a third place tie for southwestern Michigan.

Senator Dunlap has never yielded more than 40% of that produced by the previously mentioned varieties. It is, however, the number one home garden berry for table use, although a very poor variety to grow commercially.

Of all the disease resistant varieties, I would choose Fairland and Sparkle. It should be mentioned, however, that Fairland has sometimes shown to be very susceptible to brown stem end rot.