Success With Everbearing Strawberries

By Karl Michener, *grower*
Burton City, Ohio

My experiences with raising strawberries started about 15 or 16 years ago. For several years I tried to raise the everbearing type but had rather poor results. The soil dried out in the summer, especially in August, and the few small berries which ripened were dirty and hardly worth picking.

At this point in my dilemma an article appeared in the Indiana Farmer in which a grower reported on the successful production of June-bearing strawberries when sawdust was used as a mulching material. This practice helped to conserve soil moisture and sounded like the logical system to use with everbearers. After several years of trial the following procedure was developed and has given excellent results. The soil upon which these berries are grown is bottomland of a fine silt-loam texture.

Sawdust Mulch System

The everbearing strawberry plants are set out in early April as soon as the soil dries out sufficiently so that it can be worked. The plants are spaced 15 inches apart in rows 42 inches apart. For about 6 or 8 weeks the rows are cultivated with a horse or tractor cultivator and weeds which grow around the plants are removed by hoeing or hand pulling.

In early June when the runners start to develop, cultivation is discontinued and about 1 to 1½ inches of sawdust is applied over the entire area occupied by the strawberries. At this time the runner plants, which are starting to send out roots, are set by hand in single rows, one on each side of the parent plants. Thus a triple row of spaced plants is established from the original single row. These side plants are located about 12 to 14 inches on each side of the parent row with plants about 10 to 12 inches apart in these side rows. About 3 runner plants are rooted from each parent plant. The important feature is to have the runner plants rather evenly spaced 10 or 12 inches apart in the rows which are 12 to 14 inches on each side of the parent row.

After the desired number of runner plants have been established all additional runners are removed during the remainder of the season. Weeds or grass must be removed by hoeing or pulled out by hand. The plants are of course too closely spaced to allow for mechanical cultivation.

Gem everbearing strawberries mulched with sawdus

If the sawdust works into the soil too much by the time autumn approaches, an additional thin layer should be applied to be sure the crowns of the plants are protected through the winter. During the years this system has been in operation, the sawdust has offered sufficient protection over the winter and no straw mulch needs to be used. Straw was applied during one winter but introduced weed and grain seeds which caused a problem the next season.

Only hardwood sawdust (either green or weathered) has been used. Softwood sawdust might give satisfactory results but has not been available or used in the trials being discussed in this article.

Blossom Removal

Everbearing strawberry plants under the sawdust mulch system of culture are fruited in exactly the same way as under any other system. In central Ohio where the author's farm is located, the blossoms of newly set plants are removed until about mid-July. If the plants are making vigorous growth the flowers may be allowed to develop fruit somewhat earlier. A strong, healthy plant is needed if the fall crop of berries is to develop into large salable fruit.

Ripe berries are picked two or three times a week from early August until frost stops growth in October.

Not An Easy System

Growers who are considering the use of this system of raising strawberries should realize that it is not an easy way to riches. As can be seen from the previous discussion, this method involves a large amount of hand labor. It is a specialized intensive method for raising strawberries, and is suggested for backyard gardens or for small commercial plantings when the grower will give careful attention to the necessary details of production. Under average conditions this system of strawberry growing requires about four times as much labor as when June-bearing varieties are raised in the conventional manner.

Results

A few comments on the results secured by this system of strawberry growing may be of interest. During 1945 about one-third acre was harvested; half of the plants were set in the spring of 1945 and half had been planted in April of 1944. From this one-third acre approximately 7000 quarts of berries were picked in 1945 and sold for about $2450. About $700 of this gross income was spent for baskets crates and picking.

In 1946 the same one-third acre was fruited plus an additional one-third acre planted in April. Flooding during the growing season caused some injury and reduced the yield. From this two-thirds acre of berries about $3100 worth of fruit was sold with the cost of baskets, crates and picking being about $1000.

Varieties

A number of different varieties have been tested.

Gem has given better yields of berries during late summer and fall than any other variety; usually it is about six times more productive. The fruit of Gem is only average in size and quality but

it produces a good number of runner plants and has been a very profitable variety.

Gemzata produces a larger June crop than Gem but is not nearly as good for the fall crop.

Mastodon produces a fairly good June crop but the berries in late summer are usually small and knotty.

Green Mountain produces an exceptionally large June crop, frequently is as productive as Premier, but is a shy bearer in the fall.

Evermore (Minn. 1166) is a vigorous growing plant and forms a good number of runners but the berry is soft and tart.

The Malling Apple Rootstocks

By H. B. Tukey,
Michigan State College

Associated with advertisements and stories about dwarf fruit trees there frequently appears the name "Malling". Questions are naturally raised as to what they are, from where they have come, how they derived their names, and what is their value.

Briefly, the Malling rootstocks are rootstocks which were standardized at the East Malling Research Station, East Malling, Kent, England, just prior to the first World War. They are of special interest because they offer improved dwarf fruit trees for garden planting, smaller than standard fruit trees for commercial orcharding, and understocks which adapt fruit trees to various soil and climatic situations.

Derivation of Malling Rootstocks

The story behind the Malling rootstocks goes back to the use of special dwarfing rootstocks in England and on the Continent. There, dwarfing rootstocks have been widely used, especially for the apple and the pear. Roughly, the dwarfing rootstocks for the apple were divided into the very dwarfing forms, called Paradise, and the semi-dwarfing forms, called Doucin, but the designations are by no means accurate.

In an examination of these rootstocks

Baldwin/Malling IX in its seventh growing season, still a small tree.