

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post
Darrell Blackwelder
May 8, 2008

Along with the great joys of flowers this spring is the arrival of strawberry season. Growers have been fortunate this season with the weather; few late frosts coupled with sunny days and cool nights make this season nearly perfect for local growers.

Berries are now at their peak available with many available as pick you own or already picked. Ripe berries can be found at the local Salisbury-Farmer's Market, local stands or at the growers farms.

Strawberries are a fat-free food high in Vitamin C and a significant source of fiber in the diet. A serving of strawberries contains more Vitamin C than a medium orange also are high in antioxidants ranking third in these substances out of all fruits and vegetables tested. Frozen strawberries retain all the nutritional benefits of fresh strawberries.

Strawberry producers in Rowan County grow pre-chilled berry plants on black plastic with drip irrigation. Even though strawberries are perennials, these plants are treated as annuals. Utilizing black plastic and drip irrigation provides cleaner and earlier berries eliminating waste in irrigation and fertilization practices. After the growing season is over, plants are removed and the raised beds and plastic can be utilized to grow other crops until the fall.

Savvy strawberry producers are now using Global Positioning Satellite Systems (GPS system) into their strawberry production practices. This system uses satellite technology to correctly apply nutrients in deficient areas reducing over-fertilization. This system not only saves money from over-application, but helps save our environment.

With all the new innovations available, growers still have to overcome battle, unseasonable temperatures, diseases, and insects-not to mention fickle customers. These are just a few variables grower must conquer before producing an abundant crop. Growers have to muster all the skills and technology available for a crop and may still have a marginal crop.

More information about strawberries including recipes for jam can be found at <http://www.ncstrawberry.com/>

Darrell Blackwelder is an agricultural agent in charge of horticulture with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Rowan County. For archived garden columns or other information, visit the Rowan County Master Gardener web site at www.rowanmastergardener.com , e-mail Darrell_Blackwelder@ncsu.edu