

Ruby June: Monthly Production Pointers

November: Focus on Late Planting & Fall Covers

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Special Expo Edition – November 2022

Greetings! We're so pleased to be a part of the NC Strawberry Expo program in Asheville this early November. Like many of you, we've been extremely busy in recent weeks with finishing up our new research planting at Cottle Farms in Faison, NC and now applying fall season row covers in another test location west of Richmond, VA, on November 5th. The primary purpose of *Ruby June: Monthly Production Pointers*, is to provide commercial growers, extension workers and private consultants with our best advice on BMP's (best management practices) for this newer variety that is now being grown quite widely across the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic region and Midwest. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KEEP RECEIVING THESE MONTHLY NEWSLETTERS, PLEASE SIGN-UP AT OUR EXHIBIT DESK!

How Best to Deal with Late Plantings?

Due to circumstances beyond the control of commercial plug propagators in the summer of 2022, a number of growers are just now receiving delivery of plug plants – several weeks late! This is by no means an “exhaustive list” of best management practices/strategies to follow to improve the yield of late set plug plants, but they could make a difference!

Five things you can do improve the yield potential of late-set plugs:

- 1) Have plenty of workers on hand for planting plugs when they are (finally) delivered – you cannot afford to lose even a single day.
- 2) If the plugs have incompletely developed root systems (i.e. the roots do not fully occupy the soil media), you should consider hand transplanting. Don't attempt to transplant Immature plugs with a water wheel – they will break apart.
- 3) Watering is critical! If you have overhead irrigation, plan on running the system for 2-3 hours the first day, 2 hours the second day, 1 hour for the 3rd day after planting (Fig. 1a). If you don't have overhead, then plan on using a field nurse tank for watering-in the plugs by hand, or consider building a rig such as shown in Figure 1b that eliminates the need for overhead (Fig. 1b). Definitely plan on running your drip system all through the fall season to provide good soil moisture for these plugs at all times!



1a



1b

- 4) **DO NOT APPLY ROW COVERS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PLANTING!** Did you know that on a day with a high temperature of 60 F that a newly set plug plant beneath a row cover could possibly be exposed to a temperature as high as 90 F in the mid-afternoon! On warm sunny days in the fall it doesn't take long for newly set plugs to wilt down! If the grower is not very attentive to soil moisture conditions, plugs plants under these warm covers can easily 'wick out' (dry out) and possibly die!

My rule: *You should not apply row covers any sooner than two weeks following planting.* If you are dealing with a plug crop that has been set 2-3 weeks late, you might be able to apply covers in perhaps as few as 9 days post-plant, but no sooner (Fig. 2a). Ideally, you should try to wait 13-14 days (Fig. 2b).



2a

2b

Figs 2a and 2b. The 9-day old Ruby June plug shown in 2a was transplanted on 10/22/22 (E. B. Poling photo, 10/31/22, Faison, NC). For comparison, the 13-day old Ruby June plug shown in 2b was transplanted on 10/18/22, and with just 4 more days of growth you can see primary roots that have extended as much as 2 inches beyond the plug root ball (primary roots have a long stringy appearance), and numerous small with secondary roots (these make up the bulk of the strawberry root system). From a rooting perspective, it's worth the wait to NOT apply covers any earlier than 9 days, and preferably you should wait 2 weeks.

- 5) **Applying covers to late-planted plugs:** With so many strawberry plantings being made 2-3 weeks late, we do not wish to overlook a single factor that may contribute to more rapid plant development in the coming weeks of November and early December. As soon as this spell of unusually warm conditions in early November has ended (probably by this Saturday, Nov 11), you should consider applying your row covers to late-planted plugs. On Saturday (11/12/22) the high temperature in the Greensboro area, for example, will only be in the low 60s, and then we will see a real cooling off period with daytime highs only the 50s during the early week of Nov 14-17. ***Our usual rule for applying row covers in the fall season is to wait to apply covers until you have had 2-3 consecutive days of daytime highs that are 60 F, or lower.*** Next week (11/14-11/20) will be the perfect time to apply covers to late planted plugs in many areas. For example, in the Greensboro area, we will be seeing a string of daytime temperatures below the 60 F, and daytime highs may only be in the mid-40's on Friday (11/18). Further, the minimum temperature on Friday night/Saturday morning (11/18-11/19) in Greensboro will be in very low 20s (Source: AWIS). It should be noted that if you have well-established plugs that were transplanted "on time", you do NOT need to apply covers! That's right! You can take advantage of the colder temperatures coming later next week for *hardening-off plug plants* that were transplanted in a more normal planting window.

NOTE: late planted plugs will also need to be hardened off, and row covers should be removed at some point in December to expose these plants to a week or more of near freezing temperatures.

- 6) AWIS Weather Services is currently piloting a vital service that can help you make weather related decisions throughout the strawberry growing season. This service features a weekly Strawberry Discussion with key weather events taking place in your geographic location, as well as regional weather related events. In addition to detailed daily weather reports, this service has a Growing Degree Day Unit calculator that is adjusted to your personalized planting dates. This information can help you better predict your first blooms, and help inform your protection strategies during critical growing periods and adverse weather systems. Scan the QR code to read the most recent Regional Strawberry Discussion, and email kerri@flavorfirst.com with questions or inquiries.

