

weevil that lays its eggs in the stem of the flower and essentially cuts it right off. More problematic is the tarnished plant bug. As few as one nymph per flower cluster can result in deformed fruit. Put out some white sticky traps so you know when the adults arrive. Watch the catalogs for an OMRI approved formulation of *beauveria bossiana*, which is a fungal disease of TPB. I sprayed Naturalis this spring, with some effect. It held the population growth back but failed to prevent the numbers from cresting at about 3 nymphs per cluster at the end of blossoming.

This is where the reason why so few people grow any quantities of organic strawberries becomes clear. This TPB damage means losing the last third of the crop, which is a serious blow to making a profit on all this work I have described here. I love knowing that my fruit is pesticide free, but I also know my pesticide using competitors have their reasons. This insect remains the main stumbling block to more wide spread organic strawberry production, and this insect is relatively easily controlled with chemical sprays. The organic berries are healthier by miles for the consumer, and sell for 25% more. But the later part of the crop is frequently ruined.

Another tack to try is that used by Paul Hartshorn, an organic farmer in Waitsfield, Vt. Paul has pioneered in covering his entire strawberry field each fall with a large row cover, which he leaves in place the following spring. This does not so much act as a barrier against the TPB adults as it encourages much earlier flowering, before the population of TPB nymphs has reached that critical threshold. It also makes the whole crop come on 1 to two weeks earlier, which can run into some seriously cold weather that the row cover will not offer enough protection, so it has its risks. I think I am going to try this system out, as I am growing frustrated with the spotty effectiveness of any approved spray material for TPB control.

Strawberries can be renovated and kept for a second fruiting year. Mow them down to sticks, and narrow the rows again with cultivation. Then water and fertilize and let the rows grow out again. Weed control is problematic with the 2nd fruiting year, and many organic growers skip it. I usually keep my patch for a 2nd try but also plant a new one every year.

This adds greatly to the cost of organic production, as our chemical using neighbors just solve this problem with herbicides. The herbicides frequently end up in the groundwater and on into the environment. Better to ask the public to pay more for their fruit and grow it in a manner without lots of hidden costs.

Growing strawberries organically will make you very popular with your neighbors, whether you pick or invited them in to pick their own. Good luck!