

LINGONBERRY AN ALTERNATIVE SMALL FRUIT CROP

Second Year Report

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Goals:

The project will establish a trial planting of Lingonberries, an alternative small fruit crop that was a native North American fruit. The project will trial the Lingonberry as a crop suited for Northeast farm growing conditions and as a product to be directly marketed by the grower.

Farm information and findings:

The location of the lingonberry planting was a site that was prepared for blueberries. The soil tested 5.2 pH and wood shavings and compost had been plowed into the soil the previous fall.

After the first growing season the market garden at the farm has been enlarged and this directly impacts the lingonberry plants. They have total sunlight for the entire day. The plants have responded well to the increase in light, even though the summer drought put a severe stress on all of the gardens. There was no irrigation to the plants but they continue to grow and put out new runners.

There have been two applications of mulch around the plants. Old hay from around the sheep feeders was used because there is a lot of the material and it is free. We originally used wood shavings, but the availability of the shavings has ceased and we needed to find a cheap, abundant source of mulch. We know full well that there is a weed problem associated with hay use, but the mulch hay used has been chewed through and walked on by the sheep. We have used the same mulch around our vegetable plants without a lot of increased weed pressure. The lingonberries thrive when heavy amounts of mulch are placed around the plants. New runners are sent out and emerge from the mulch, so removal of the mulch would be impossible.

The plants were heavily mulched over the winter with the hay being put down right after Christmas time. I tried to pull the mulch back in early spring like you would with strawberries, but this did not work at all. The plants seemed to put out small runner plants even into the cold weather and with the moving of the mulch they were injured by the weather. I would not recommend removing the mulch at all.

The second application of mulch was put down mid summer as the drought wore on and on. There really never was any relief until the fall when we had huge downfalls of rain for days on end. The

plants didn't seem affected by either condition. There might have been more growth if irrigation was available, but even without the plants continued to grow.

I have never seen any insect near, on or at all interested in the plants. Even the Japanese beetles do not come near the plants. We fertilized the plants once with a dilute solution of fish emulsion. There seemed to be increased growth after about two weeks time. I couldn't find any fertilizer recommendations for the plants, so they got one application of the fish emulsion.

There were small white flowers on the Red Pearl plants this year. The flowers fell off and there were not any berries. There was not a second variety in bloom and so they probably were not fertilized. This is one consideration for those buying plants or plugs for their plantings. The plants really have grown so much faster than the tissue culture plugs that the time saved in growing out the plants would be a consideration over the amount of money saved buying the tissue culture plugs.

One variety of lingonberries, the Erntesegen that were sent only in tissue culture plugs have had a large number, at least 75%, die over the past two seasons. I do not know if it is the variety or the tissue culture plugs having such a small root system.

Cooperators:

I have done all of the care of the plants. An Extension Agent has been consulted on the use of fertilizer. I also consulted with Marvin Pritts during a Small Fruit School regarding the use and application of mulch.

Economic findings:

Except for the initial plant investment there have been no more actual dollars spent on the plants. We have invested in a drip irrigation system for the vegetable garden and will hook up an outlet for the lingonberries. There has not been a crop yet, so no income has been produced from the plants.

Continue to use this practice?

The plants are certainly easy care, but as of this time there still has not been a crop. As a side note, this year we planted 6 100 ft. rows of a multi-branching sunflower. The plants were almost as easy to care for as the lingonberries and got the same one time application of fertilizer. We were able to harvest sunflowers and sell the bunches of 8 stems wholesale for \$2.50 a bunch right up to frost. With the number of local established roadside markets, I could not keep up with the demand for the flowers. The seed packet cost about \$3.50. Now as we look at the economics of small fruit the dollar amount that we were immediately able to make from the flowers compared to the large investment in plants (\$600.) for the lingonberries and the wait to make even \$1.00 leads us to the conclusion that for cash flow

purposes, flowers, coupled with the vegetables we grow, really make sense for our operation. This is our opinion, but we are a young, expanding farming operation and we do not have the money to tie up a field with no immediate return. This would have to be considered when someone is looking into adding to their direct marketing product base.

Outreach:

I have received a number of phone calls from all over the east coast from people who have read about the test plot and want to know more. I will be developing an information sheet that the Cooperative Extension will review and then help disseminate.