



Cornell releases high-yield berry varieties

Cornell's berry breeding program is releasing high-yielding strawberry and raspberry varieties, which will be available for planting in spring 2019.

The Crimson Treasure raspberry is third in the Crimson series, following Crimson Giant and Crimson Night, and the Dickens strawberry was named after the famous English author because it "yields like the dickens".

Both varieties — from Courtney Weber, berry breeder and Associate Professor in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell AgriTech — produce large fruits with vibrant colours that maintain peak flavour for longer than most heritage varieties.

First discovered in Weber's breeding fields in 2002, the Dickens strawberry is June-bearing and can survive cold winters, making it suitable for New York. The bright red fruit is firm but flavourful, holding well on the plant and in the container, according to Weber. Production trials throughout the region have shown Dickens consistently produces high-quality fruit, and tests have found it to be tolerant to root rot and other common diseases.

"With New York-grown berries, because we don't have to ship so far, we can handle a softer fruit. And people notice the softer, sweeter, juicier fruit," Weber said. "Customers can get supermarket strawberries any day of the week; the reason people make the effort to come to the farm stand or farmers' market and buy the local product is because it tastes so much better. Maintaining that flavour is paramount to what we do in our breeding program."

The Crimson Treasure raspberry, discovered in 2012, is autumn-bearing and produces long-lasting, bright-red fruit. The raspberries are also larger, weighing around 4 to 6 g compared to the 2.5 g of the Heritage raspberry.

"Colour is a big deal. You need fruit that does not darken after you pick them," Weber said. "A lot of older varieties, after you pick them and put them in the cooler, they darken and then look overripe. This one doesn't; it holds its colour and eating quality well."

The Dickens strawberry will be available from Nourse Farms in Massachusetts, and the Crimson Treasure raspberry from North American Plants in Oregon.

Cornell's berry breeding program is the oldest in the US, and the university's berries are grown all over the world. Crimson Treasure has been planted in trials in New York, California, Mexico and the



European Union; the Heritage raspberry is the most commonly grown raspberry variety in Chile; and Crimson Night and Double Gold raspberry varieties are under licence in Japan.

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