



# **Berry Good Strawberries**

**John Dysinger — AdAgrA 2025**

# EVERYBODY LOVES STRAWBERRIES...

When the sun is shining,  
and the birds are  
singing, and the  
freshness of Spring is in  
the air....

But, they have no idea  
what goes into bringing  
that fruit to maturity!  
Make sure to count the  
cost before you dive in!



# Spoiler Alert!

Much of what I say in this presentation is now up-in-the-air because of a major new disease called

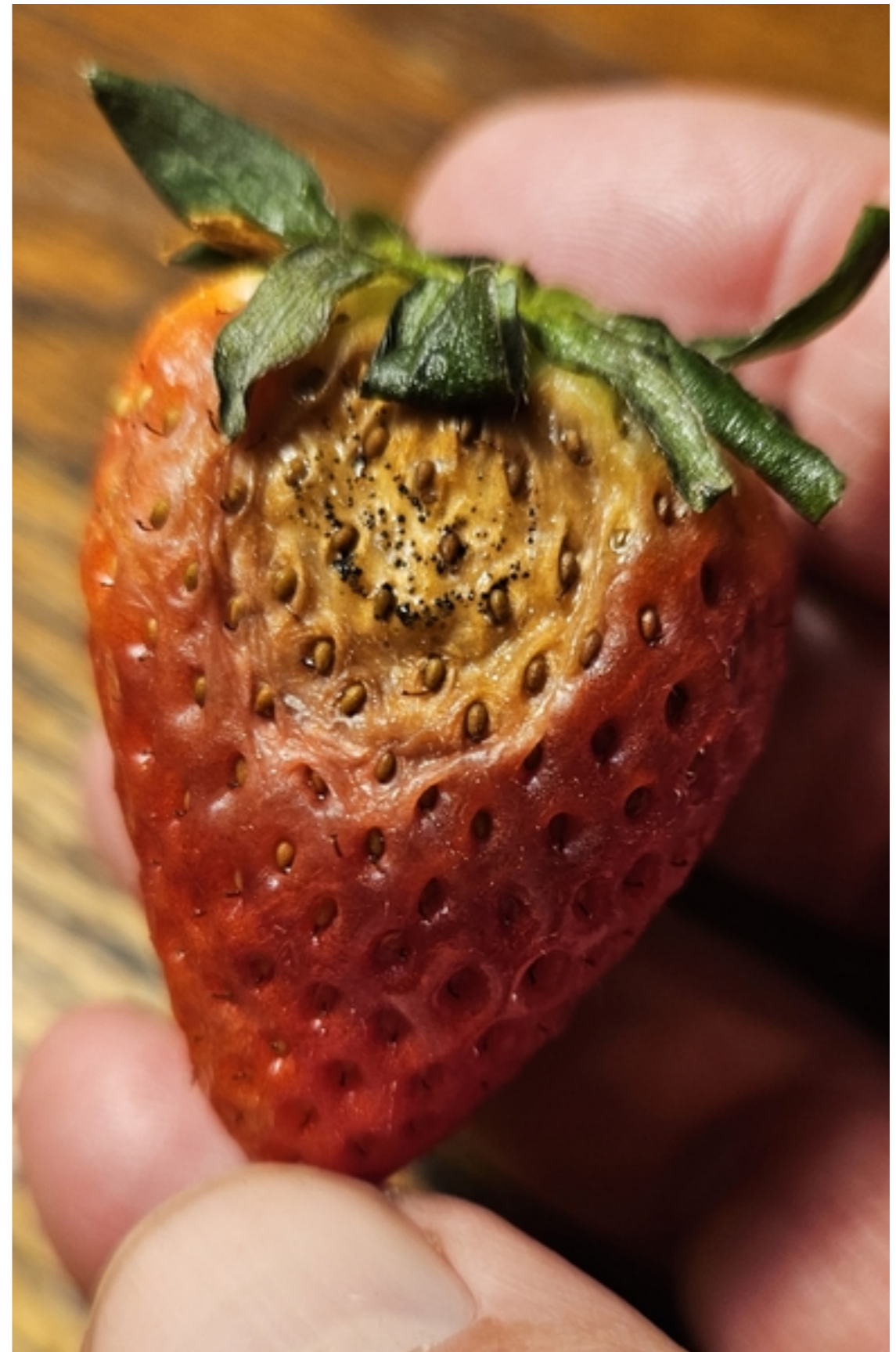
Neo-P

(Neopestalotiopsis).

All major Eastern suppliers tested positive for the disease in the Fall of 2024.

Western nurseries have not been effected (yet).

Stay informed!



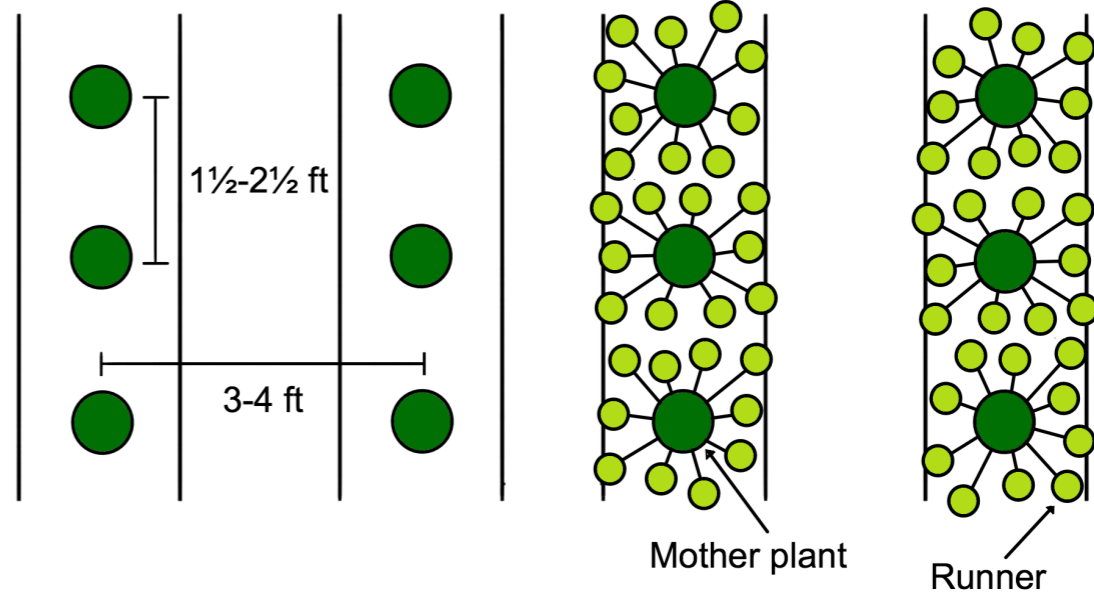
## 2 Main Growing Methods:

<b>Matted Row Pros:</b>	<b>Plasticulture Pros:</b>	<b>Matted Row Cons:</b>	<b>Plasticulture Cons:</b>
<b>Lower initial investment cost</b>	<b>Increased picking efficiency</b>	<b>WEEDS!</b>	<b>Higher establishment costs</b>
<b>Plantings can last 3+ years</b>	<b>Better weed/disease control</b>	<b>Slower picking</b>	<b>Specialized equipment (helpful)</b>
<b>Adapted to colder climates</b>	<b>Higher yields and bigger berries</b>	<b>Potential for higher disease pressure</b>	<b>Re-plant every year</b>
<b>Less risk of frost damage</b>	<b>Less ongoing maintenance</b>	<b>1 year from planting to first harvest</b>	<b>Greater frost risk</b>



At planting

+1 Year



# 4 Main Ways to Start Strawberries:



**Plugs**



**Cutoffs**

**Dormant,  
Bare  
Root**



**Runners**



# Strawberry Plasticulture 101

A Few Tips and Techniques

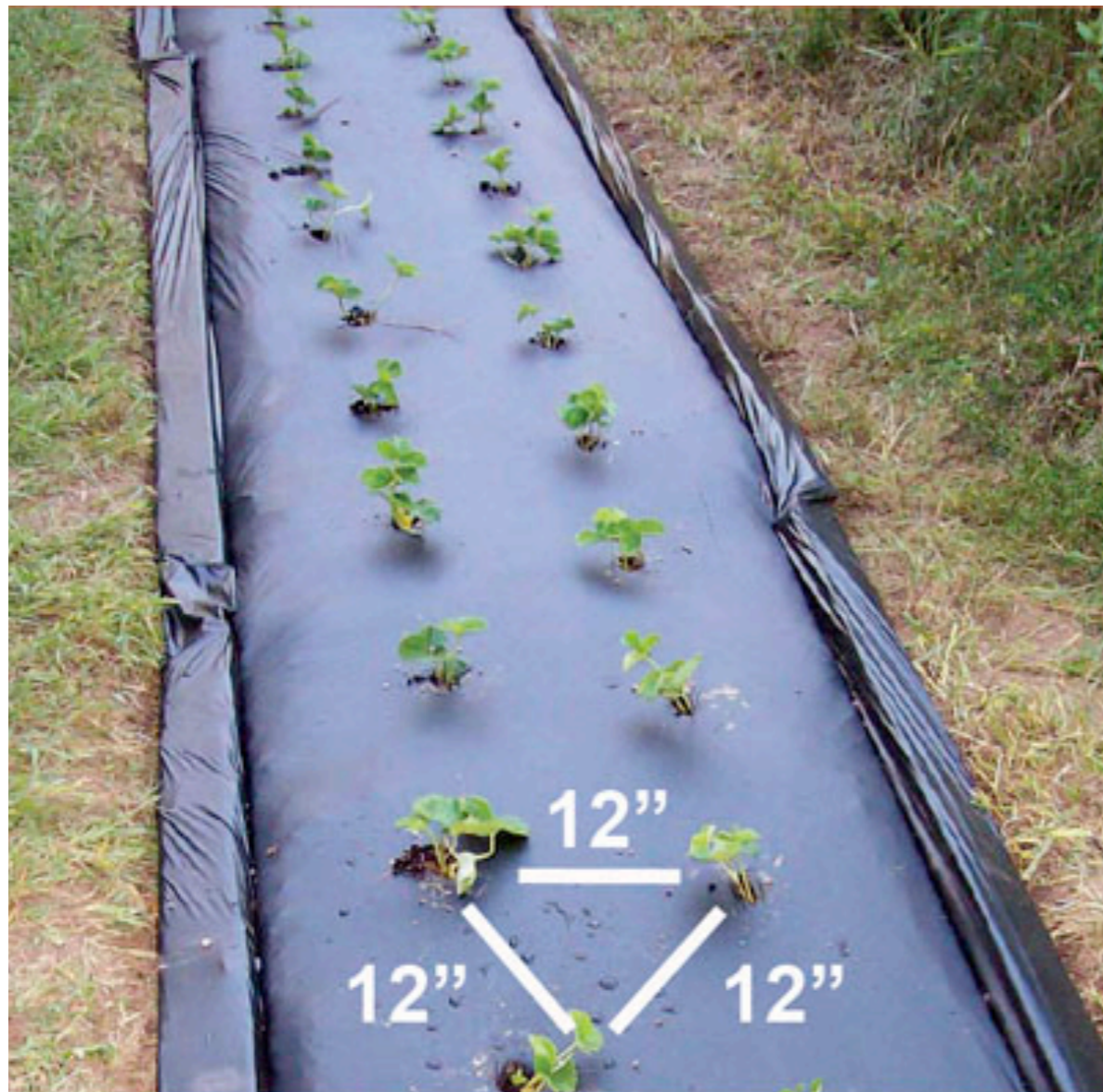
# Timing is (almost) Everything

- Tips set the end of August (in Middle TN) under mist.
- Plugs planted in the field the end of September (or even the first week of October — planting dates get later with increasingly warmer Falls)
- If you wait a week past target planting dates, yields can begin to suffer.
- Planting dates for Northern growers would be earlier; Southern growers would be later.

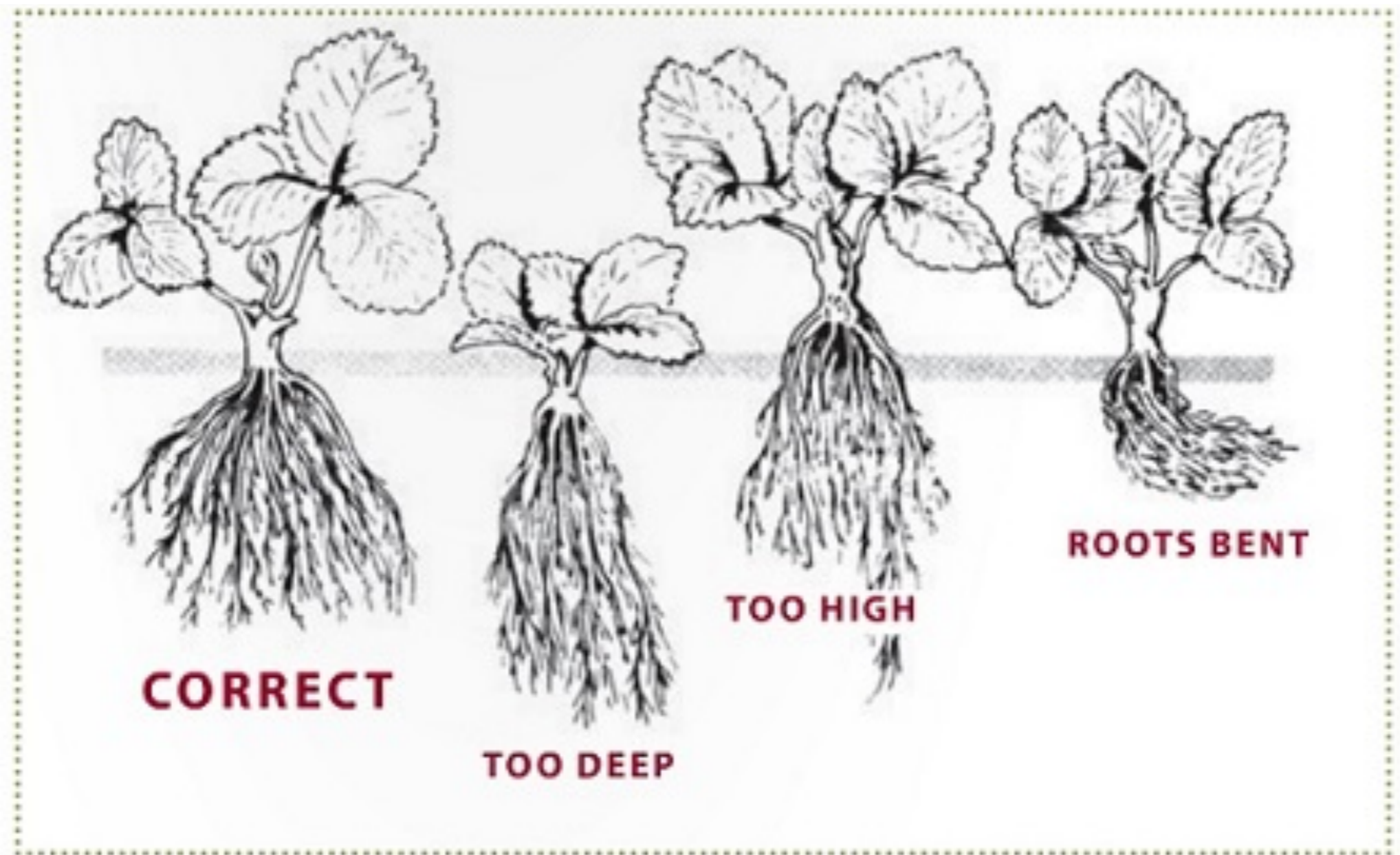




# Making your Bed(s)



- Bed recommendations:
  - 6-8" high, 30" wide
  - Plants 12-14" apart
  - 1 row of drip tape down the center of the bed
- Can be done by hand on a small scale (see photo).
- On a larger scale, buy a tractor pulled bed maker/mulch layer!
- Can also use landscape fabric, but you will get 30% less yield.



# Planting depth is critical

Too high or too deep can compromise or kill your plants!

# “Baby” Your Plants in the Fall

- Irrigate faithfully after planting. Don't let soil get dried out.
- Protect from deer and other pests.
- Try to keep your plants in the ideal temperature range during the first couple months after planting. (70's in the daytime, 50's at night)
- Two branch crowns by Thanksgiving is ideal.



# Toughen Them Up in the Winter



- Weed and “sanitize” (take off dead leaves, runners, flowers, etc.) ideally in late Nov. and again in late Feb.
- Try to let them go into dormancy slowly.
- Only protect them (with row cover) if temperatures go below 10 degrees or if the plants are not dormant.

# Protect Them in the Spring

- Plants begin blooming in March. They must be protected from frost — either by sprinklers or by floating row cover.
- Moisture is deadly to strawberry fruit! Keeping rain off is ideal.
- Weekly spraying is helpful (ideally with a mistblower)





## **Enjoy them April-June**

\*Pick at least 3 times/week

\*If weather is hot, pick them “close” and drip irrigate often.

# Rain Protection



- Raised, plastic-covered beds
- Individual plants with airflow around each one.
- Organic fungicide regime. Oxidate/Serenade/Trilogy/Double Nickel
- Caterpillar Tunnels over plants in the Spring

# Common Strawberry Diseases:



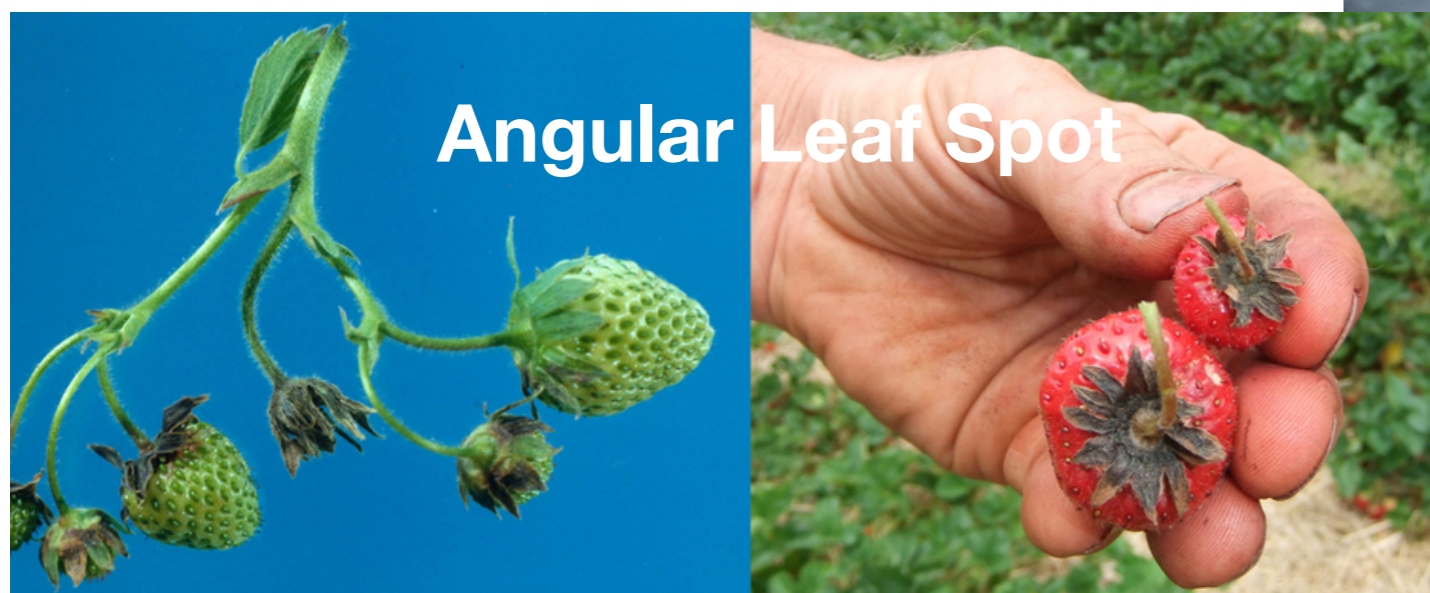
**Botrytis or Grey Mold**



**Anthracnose**



**Leather Rot**



**Angular Leaf Spot**



# Frost Protection

- Traditionally done with sprinklers. Sprinklers must be kept going until air temperatures rise above freezing. We like Senninger Wobblers. Need 45-60 gal./minute/acre.
- Floating row covers can be an easier solution. We use 1.0 oz/sq.yd. Covers may need to be doubled or tripled if the temperatures really drop. Ideally you need a thermometer under the row cover to monitor temperatures.
- If you want to be really safe, use sprinklers on top of row covers!



# Pest Protection

- 7.5' Deer Fencing (Trade name: Tenax Cintoflex)
- 8' t-posts every 25'
- Yellow, electric fence insulators on the top of each post.
- Hang fencing from the insulators and drape it out on the ground.





**Sap Beetles**

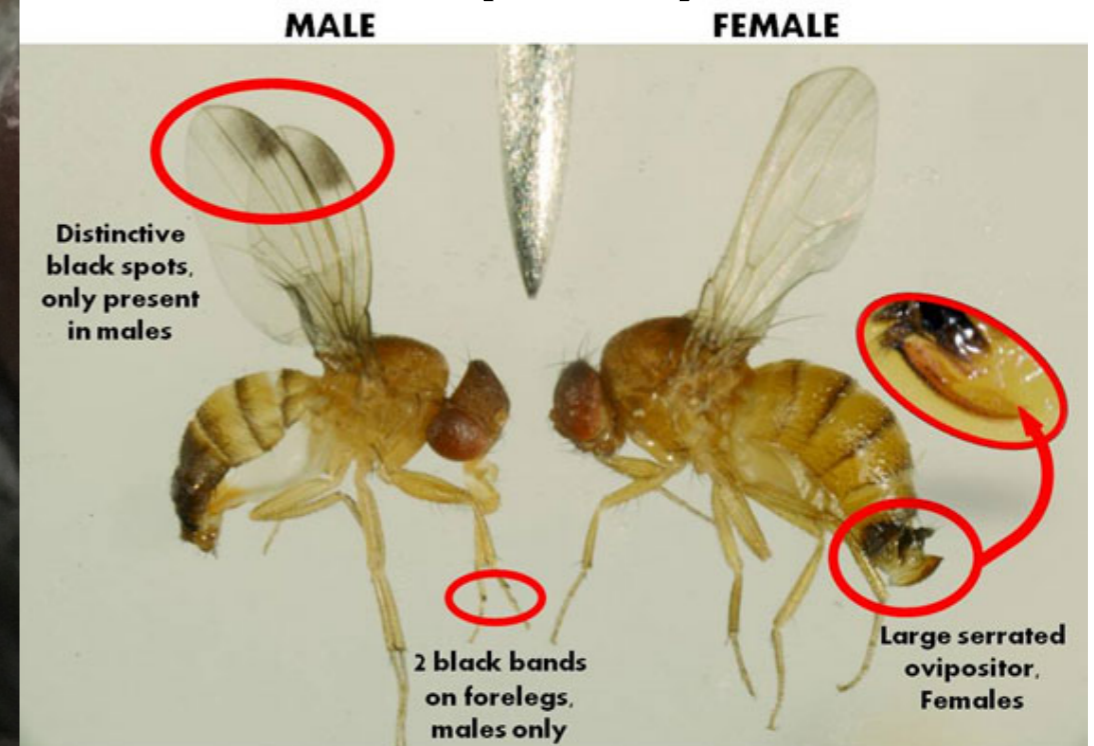


**Tarnished Plant Bug**



**SWD Larvae**

## **Spotted-Winged Drosophila (SWD)**



# Bonus:



- We had our best crop ever this last year using products from Advancing Ecological Agriculture ([advancingecoag.com](http://advancingecoag.com))
- It combines weekly foliar feeding with weekly (or bi-weekly) fertigation.
- It is a serious time and money investment, but the results speak for themselves.

# Resources:

- These are plant sources I have used and been satisfied with. There are MANY others out there that may be just as good or better.
  1. [noursefarms.com](http://noursefarms.com). MA (I consider this to be the premier source for small fruit plants.)
  2. [indianaberry.com](http://indianaberry.com). IN
  3. [isons.com](http://isons.com). GA
  4. [cottlefarms.com](http://cottlefarms.com). NC (where we buy our runner tips)
- These are great, trusted information sources for answering your small fruit questions.
  5. [attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org). Look in their publication library for excellent, well-researched articles on organic strawberry production — plus many other fruits and vegetables. Excellent resource!
  6. [smallfruits.org](http://smallfruits.org). Small fruit information specifically for the Southeast. Look for the Strawberry Plasticulture Production Guide.