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Sweet, Sweet Strawberries

Jennifer Polanz



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I grew up on 4 acres of land outside of Columbus, Ohio, in a town that used to be very rural. We had two stoplights in the “downtown,” with a small grocery store, a local pizza shop, a florist and a Dairy Queen. Oh, and the old mill, a sort of general store. I’m not sure if it even had a name; everybody just called it the old mill.

Whether by necessity, sport or both, we had a 1-acre garden on our property and we grew everything you could grow in the Columbus climate, including strawberries. I say we—I mostly partook in stealing fruits off the plants, as well as harvesting and prep for freezing and canning. My parents and grandparents did most of the planting and maintaining (although I do remember hoeing weeds and planting seeds at a very early age). Boy, there was nothing better than a fresh strawberry straight off the plant. That sweetness—it was like candy.

At the time, you either ate them right then or made jam for canning to enjoy year-round. Today, strawberries are available year-round in the store (although they just don’t taste the same as those June berries). My kids requested them weekly, even in the middle of winter, and it always amazed me that they were there at the grocery store whenever we wanted them. Modern times, man.

Today, strawberries are a relatively newer indoor production crop and they’re still a challenge for growers. In this issue, we have two articles about strawberry production. In freelancer Dave Kuack’s story on tackling some of the finer points on the crop, one of his sources noted you can grow them indoors, and that’s pretty much where the similarity ends to other CEA crops like lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers. You can read what Dave learned on page 16.

In our second strawberry story, researchers at Michigan State

University share more detailed insights into what they’ve found through their studies. In fact, they’ve learned so much it’s going to be a four-part series, one in every issue of *Inside Grower* this year. In the first installment on page 26, they look at how temperatures impact different everbearing strawberry cultivars.

Another invention our modern times has brought us is robots, or in this case, cobots: collaborative robots that work alongside workers (not replacing them). Bossman Beytes took a look at this new iteration of technology on page 12.

One thing modern technology can't replace is creativity. When Ph.D. researcher Brandan Shur came to me with an idea for an article about creativity's place in CEA production, I thought it was interesting and worth pursuing. While there's a need for continuity and repetition in growing, there's room for thinking outside the box (isn't that what led us to CEA growing in the first place?). He wrote it with North Carolina State Professor Emeritus William (Bill) Fonteno, which brought two perspectives from different stages of industry experience together at once. You can read their take on page 20.

There's a lot more in here, too—like what to do in a recall, exploring soft chemistries and Gene Giacomelli's discussion on the actual potential for attaining sustainable growing—so explore at your leisure, possibly with a bowl of fresh strawberries as a healthy snack. **IG**