

Scenes from the 2010 Virginia Biological Farming Conference
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High Tunnel Raspberry Production without Pesticides

Shirley Kline, Bridgeton, NJ

- Reviewed by Linda Davis

This talk cleared up a nagging confusion in my mind about the two kinds of raspberries, Floracane (summer bearing) and Primocane (fall bearing). The Floracanes grow vegetatively over the first season, and must have a cold period before fruiting the following year. Primocanes produce in the first season by mid-July and then produce a second crop early the following year. “Heritage” is of this type. Kline mentioned some of her favorite varieties of raspberry, including Joan J, Josephine, and K81-6.

It was inspiring to see the high tunnels with their neat rows of raspberries, and Kline discussed the advantages of the various types of shelter available. Dew and rain promote bacterial and fungal disease, so high tunnel culture provides a way to keep the plants dry and less susceptible to disease. The high tunnel also provides some protection from high temperatures in mid-summer sun, apparently a welcome relief to raspberries. Soil pH should be just slightly acid, 6.5-6.8. Raspberries are not especially heavy feeders, so soil fertility is not much of a stumbling block. Kline uses Chick Mix for nitrogen supplementation.

Raspberries respond well to the use of biological control for spotted spider mites (by using a species of predatory mites), and control of insects that spend a portion of their lives in the soil (by using parasitic nematodes). Also, she has not found that Japanese beetles are as persistent a problem in the high tunnels. Apparently the beetles don’t readily fly into the tunnels.

Pinching back the growing point of canes when they are about 18-24” promotes more fruiting area on the canes, a good trick to increase the harvest. Another helpful hint is to remove pencil-thin canes when they are about 18” tall. And after the harvest, the mantra to learn is “if the cane is brown, cut it down; if green let it be.”