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HS818

'Earlibrite' Strawberry[1]

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Introduction

There is a need in west central Florida and other winter strawberry production areas for an early ripening cultivar to replace or be an alternative to 'Sweet Charlie'. 'Sweet Charlie' has benefitted the Florida strawberry industry through its relatively high production of fruit early in the season, when market prices are generally high. But the average size of 'Sweet Charlie' fruit is small, and the texture of its fruit is often soft, making shipment and shelf life of 'Sweet Charlie' problematic. 'Earlibrite' strawberry has produced high early-season (December through February) yields of large, flavorful fruit at the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Dover (GCREC-Dover) and in three commercial fields in west central Florida. It is recommended for trial in areas with mild winter climates. The clone was named 'Earlibrite' because of its high early-season production of bright red fruit, and to honor Earl Albregts, a soil scientist who spent his entire professional career (1967-1994) at GCREC-Dover.

Origin

'Earlibrite' originated from a 1993 cross between 'Rosa Linda' and FL 90-38. 'Rosa Linda', a 1996 release from the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, was used as a parent because of its high early-season yield potential and its desirable fruit shape. FL 90-38, a 1991 selection, was used as a parent primarily because of its ability to produce attractive fruit early in the season. The original plant of 'Earlibrite' was selected in 1993 from a field nursery at GCREC- Dover. 'Earlibrite', tested as selection FL 93-100, has been evaluated in replicated plot trials at Dover and in observational trials for several years at the University of Floridas Suwannee Valley Research and Education Center, Live Oak.

Figure 1. 'Earlibrite' strawberry plant.

1. This document is HS818, one of a series of the Horticultural Sciences Department, Gulf Coast Research and Education Center-Dover, Florida Cooperative Extension, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Please visit the EDIS Web site at http:\edis.ifas.ufl.edu.
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Description

'Earlibrite' is a short day cultivar. It has a more compact plant habit than 'Sweet Charlie' or 'Camarosa'. The compact plant habit leads to the production of fruit that are exposed, and therefore, easy to harvest (Figure 1). This exposure, however, also makes the fruit vulnerable to rain damage (i.e. cracking and cat-facing). Fruit of 'Earlibrite' tend to be very large. Marketable fruit of 'Earlibrite' had an average weight of over 20 grams in trials at GCREC-Dover. Large fruit size is an important breeding objective, and a key factor in the improvement of harvest efficiency. Primary fruit are often globose-conic in shape; whereas secondary and tertiary fruit are conic to wedge-shaped (Figure 2). External fruit color is a deep orange red; internal color is a light orange red. The calyx is generally medium in size and slightly recurved, a feature that may provide some structural resistance to Botrytis fruit rot (caused by *Botrytis cinerea*). Fruit of 'Earlibrite' are moderately firm and generally have desirable flavor intensity and sweetness. 'Earlibrite' also has some of the aromatic qualities of its parent 'Rosa Linda'.

Figure 2. 'Earlibrite' fruit.

Performance

'Earlibrite' grown in three commercial fields in the Dover/Plant City area during the 1999-2000 season produced early-season fruit yields comparable to those of 'Sweet Charlie'. 'Earlibrite' has also been an early producer of large fruit in the observational plots in north Florida, but in this location it generally lacks vigor and is less productive than 'Camarosa' and 'Chandler'. 'Earlibrite' is susceptible to anthracnose fruit rot (caused by *Colletotrichum acutatum*), but, in most years, this disease has not been a serious problem. We anticipate that growers in central Florida will finish harvesting 'Earlibrite' in early March, which is typically before environmental conditions are favorable for disease development. 'Earlibrite' appears to be less susceptible than 'Sweet Charlie' to Botrytis fruit rot and less susceptible than 'Camarosa' to powdery mildew (caused by *Sphaerotheca macularis*). 'Earlibrite' can, however, be severely affected by the twospotted spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*).

Availability

The Florida Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has applied for a U.S. plant patent on 'Earlibrite', and this cultivar has been uniquely characterized using DNA fingerprinting technology. 'Earlibrite' is licensed to the Florida Strawberry Growers Association by Florida Foundation Seed Producers, Inc. Information on nurseries sub-licensed to propagate 'Earlibrite' can be obtained from the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, P.O. Drawer 2550, Plant City, FL 33564.