

'Sweet Charlie' Strawberry¹

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Introduction

'Sweet Charlie' strawberry (*Fragaria xananassa*) offers strawberry growers in Florida, and other areas with relatively mild winter climates, a short-day cultivar that is early fruiting and produces fruit that has a distinctively sweet flavor and is resistant to anthracnose (caused by *Colletotrichum acutatum*). Plants of 'Sweet Charlie' generally start producing ripe fruit about two weeks earlier than 'Camarosa', a University of California release, that is currently the standard, main-season cultivar in west central Florida. 'Sweet Charlie' was named in honor of the late Charles M. (Charlie) Howard, plant pathologist at the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center from 1967 to 1991.

Origin

'Sweet Charlie' (tested as FL 85-4925) was selected in 1986 by C.M. Howard from a cross between FL 80-456 and 'Pajaro'. FL 80-456 was an anthracnose resistant clone selected by C.M. Howard in 1981. 'Pajaro' is a 1980 release from the University of California that produces firm, attractive, and flavorful fruit under west central

Florida conditions, but is highly susceptible to anthracnose.

Description

The size of 'Sweet Charlie' plants varies according to planting date, but they tend to be smaller and more compact than plants of 'Camarosa' planted on the same date (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. 'Sweet Charlie' strawberry plant. Credits: C.K. Chandler 2000

The recommended planting period for 'Sweet Charlie' in west central Florida is October 1 to

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October 15, while the recommended plant density is 17,424 to 21,780 plants/acre. Leaves are generally slightly cupped, medium to dark green, and semi-glossy. Primary fruit are usually wedge shaped; secondary and later fruit are conical to wedge shaped (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. 'Sweet Charlie' fruit. Credits: C.K. Chandler 2000

Average fruit weight is 17 g. External fruit color is orange red; internal color is orange streaked with white. The achenes are greenish yellow and slightly recessed. The calyx is large, with 1.5 to 2.5 cm long coarsely serrated lobes. Fruit of 'Sweet Charlie' is often sweet and flavorful due to a consistently low acid content. 'Sweet Charlie' has generally produced higher December and February fruit yields than other cultivars grown in west central Florida. Long distance shipment of its fruit during warm weather is not recommended because the fruit can have a relatively short shelf life.

Disease Reactions

'Sweet Charlie' has shown no symptoms of anthracnose fruit rot in commercial Florida field situations where it has been grown adjacent to susceptible cultivars that are showing severe symptoms of this disease. 'Sweet Charlie' is, however, susceptible to *Colletotrichum* crown rot (caused by *Colletotrichum gloeosporioides*). Powdery mildew (*Sphaerotheca macularis* f.sp. *fragariae*) has not been a serious problem on 'Sweet Charlie'.

Availability

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences obtained a U.S. plant patent (no. 8,729) on 'Sweet Charlie' in 1994. A list of nurseries licenced to propagate 'Sweet Charlie' can be found at <http://strawberry.ifas.ufl.edu>.