



## Strawberry Fields Forever

Taking life easy has become the order of the day at Forde Abbey Fruit Farm near Chard this year with new 'table top' grown strawberries taking the back ache out of picking. Rows of strawberries have been grown at a comfortable height of 3½ feet alongside a wide range of other soft fruit to create a more sociable and accessible way of enjoying the freshest and tastiest fruit possible.

Owner Julian Kennard has planted 12,000 new strawberry plants over the last two months while also maintaining existing gooseberry, redcurrant, blackcurrant, raspberry, tayberry and jostaberry plants. "The benefits of this system are not just for the pickers. With the strawberries grown in bags off the ground we are able to control the time of ripening more closely creating a longer fruiting season."

Setting up the system has not been an easy option though and a great deal of hard work has gone into creating the necessary 1200m of supporting posts and rails and installing the complex computer controlled irrigation system. "The new irrigation system is far more efficient than anything we have used before, delivering the right amount of water as it is needed."

Julian explains the reasoning behind this move, "We had an excellent season for raspberries last year with good crops of gooseberries, redcurrants and blackcurrants. But the strawberries were disappointing and I wanted to try this method of growing to make the fruit more consistent. I also know that fruit picking is a social activity for a lot of people so we have deliberately left wide gaps between the rows so there is room to pick and chat at the same time. We even have 4 varieties of conventionally grown strawberries for traditionalists!"

This is definitely a long term venture for Forde Abbey. The current 5 acres of soft fruit will increase next year with a further extension of the table top system and visitors to the fruit farm can also see the nursery areas with young fruit plants maturing for future years. Growing

soft fruit has been a feature of life at Forde Abbey for many years and surely there is no better way of spending a few hours than collecting fresh fruit on a summer's day surrounded by such beautiful countryside. The fruit shop can even supply you with locally produced cream to enjoy with the fruits of your labours!

Forde Abbey Fruit Farm will open daily from the 6<sup>th</sup> June, 9.30am-6pm (weather permitting) with strawberries and gooseberries joined by redcurrants, blackcurrants, raspberries, tayberries and jostaberries as they ripen. Ready picked fruit may be ordered in advance by calling 01460 30460.



Julian Kennard inspecting the new 'table-top' grown strawberries



Daughter, Marcia, inspecting the traditionally grown fruit!

**END**

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