

Pick-your-own season a sign of summer

By JANET DUVAL

Special to the Independent/Free Press

It's strawberry season in Halton Hills. There are pick-your-own farms within minutes of any part of town, and the annual ritual is a delightful signal that summer is definitely here.

It's a blissful experience gathering fruit on a warm day, surrounded by lush fields, distant woods, and a quiet broken only by the hum of insects or the cries of a passing killdeer. The berries hang like jewels under their low green canopy, treasures to be discovered and savoured.

Wear comfortable clothes and shoes when you head for the fields, and bring a hat and sunscreen.

"It's great exercise," says Bert

Andrews of Andrews Scenic Acres. Whether you kneel, squat, or bend to pick, you'll develop those leg muscles as you advance through the patch.

Growers say this season is later than usual, but they're expecting an excellent crop.

"Every year is better than last year" says the congenial Andrews, "just like every day is better than the one before." Most expect to be open at least until mid July.

Berries like sunny weather for ripening, with temperatures in the low seventies, conditions that are perfect for pickers as well. A timely rain, maybe once a week, and preferably at night, means growers don't have to use their irrigation systems.

At the season's peak, you can

pick a quart for every foot of row says Coring De Paoli of The Farm. Well organized farms will direct visitors to specific sections of the field, so you won't be picking where others have already been. You'll have plenty of berries in under an hour.

De Paoli reminds you that you can save the 75 cent cost of a fruit basket by bringing your own from home. Growers let you fill them to overflowing and they know you'll be sipping a berry now and then.

Head straight for home when you've finished picking. Berries deteriorate quickly. Store them in the coolest part of the refrigerator in thin layers so they won't crush each other, and don't wash or hull them until you're ready to serve.

If the berries aren't sandy, some

growers recommend that you don't wash them at all. There's no need to worry about pesticides they say, as they aren't used near picking time.

"Eat them fast, then come back and enjoy yourself and pick some more" says Bert Andrews.

To freeze, clean and hull the berries and freeze whole on trays in a single layer, then put into plastic bags. Or you can slice them, sprinkle with sugar if desired, and freeze in plastic tubs. Jam making is another obvious pleasure with fresh berries, if you can keep the family from eating them first.

Next January, thaw frozen berries until ice crystals melt, then enjoy. When it's cold and snowy outside, you'll be serving up memories of a delightful summer day in the country.

GREEN THUMB GARDENING



By CHRISTINE COLE

GALLS

Galls are swollen, abnormal growths that develop on various plant parts (leaves, branches, roots). Galls may form on virtually every landscape plant but they are most commonly found on Roses, Maples, Willows, Walnuts, Spruce and Oaks. You may be surprised to learn that many plant galls are the result of insect activity; usually a wasp, fly or midge.

Each insect species causes a characteristic gall to form. The casual insect can usually be identified by the size, shape, location and/or color of the gall that is produced. For example, the Mossyrose Gall wasp causes a globular, mossy or fuzzy gall to develop. Early in the season the galls are green, and by the end of the season they turn purple and then brown. Maple trees are subject to attack by a number of mite insects that cause numerous small galls to develop on the leaves. One that you may have noticed in the past is the Maple Spindle gall (caused by a mite). As its name suggests the galls are long and thin (spindle-like) in shape and are found on the upper leaf surfaces of sugar, silver and red maples.

In general, the insect lays its eggs in the spring, in the plant which stimulates the plant tissues to grow in an abnormal fashion and surround the eggs. When the eggs hatch into larvae they eat in the tissues of the gall.

The galls rarely cause the death of the plant. Their most serious offense is that they disfigure the plant. The only way to control these abnormal growths from developing is to control the insects "that cause them." The simplest method of doing this is to remove the plant part that contains the gall. Do this early in the season so that you get the insect larvae when it is still in the gall. Spraying the plant in early spring with a dormant oil will eliminate any overwintering insects before they lay their eggs.

Pest Diagnostic Clinic July 17-18

Visit the Garden Centre over the weekend to discover common garden pests and their damage.

Samples for identification welcome!

Each week Christine Cole of Tuitman's Garden Centre and Landscaping, Highway 25, 1 mile south of Acton, 853-2480, will be presenting helpful tips and information to assist you in creating your garden show-place!

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