

EAGLETIMES

Seedless Straw, perfect for gardeners, garlic growers May 12, 2008

Robert Frizzell, of Peachblow Farm in Charlestown, wants people to know about seedless straw - his seedless straw. He wants gardeners, and garlic growers especially, to know that he has a good product available.

“Seedless straw is the ideal product to use,” said Frizzell. “It’s great for growing garlic.”



Natural Weed Prevention

Seedless straw is not weed control, but natural weed prevention.

Straw is normally the byproduct – what is left over – from the harvest of grain. Although most commercial grain is grown in the west, much of what is grown in this region is winter rye. The grain is separated from the stalk with a thresher, leaving the stalks behind as a byproduct.

“Letting it go to grain, a lot of it falls down and when it’s mowed off to harvest the straw, you get all that grain – the seeds.” Frizzell explained. “Plus you get all the weed-seeds. When the grain matures, it dries out and opens up and allows weeds to get the sun. Before that they don’t get enough sun to grow because the rye is so thick.”

When grain matures, the weeds have matured too, and go to seed along with the rye. Most straw bales are filled with grain and weed seeds, which wind up sprouting in gardens when the straw is used as mulch.

“Who knows what there is for weeds,” he continued. “When I do a piece [field] for grain, I don’t have to seed it, it seeds itself with what falls off. There’s that much grain.”

Seedless Process



Peachblow Farm straw is seedless because the straw is the main product, not a byproduct.

Frizzell cuts his straw when it pollinates in mid June. At this point the straw is around four to five feet tall, and Frizzell has only a couple-day window to cut the straw before it begins growing seed.

“Most people don’t need straw until after June,” he said. “Mostly in the fall.”

It wasn’t until about ten years ago that Frizzell started growing his own straw so he could cover his strawberry crops.

“We began doing seedless straw because of the invasive plant species that came with the straw that we were buying from other places,” he said. “The worst weeds we have now are the ones that we imported. And it’s hard to get rid of them.”

Strawberries, like garlic, benefit from straw as mulch. Mulching strawberries in the fall insulates them from going through the shock of extreme temperatures fluctuations.

Peachblow Farm grows five acres of U-Pick strawberries, and 60-70 acres of straw. They produce 4000-5000 bales of straw annually.

Because the straw is cut in mid-June, in half the time as straw being grown for grain, the fields are double-cropped by planting squash and pumpkins for a second seasonal crop. This keeps the land active and healthy, according to Frizzell.

He also grows asparagus, some of which is sold at Beaver Pond Farm Market outside Newport.

Last year he sold straw bales to two people for building straw bale structures. Seedless straw used for straw bale homes, eliminates the tempting food source from within the walls that encourages potential rodent infestations.

Peachblow Name

Frizzell’s parents moved onto the farm in 1928. The original farmhouse built in 1763, was one of the first frame houses in the area and one of first painted houses as well. It was painted a peach blossom color, and was known as the peach blossom house. Frizzell’s mother liked the ‘peach’ part of the name, but not the ‘blossom’ part, so she came up with Peachblow.

Vicki Beaver can be reached by email at vickibeaver@yahoo.com