

High Tunnel Bramble Production

Horticulture and Armstrong Farms Annual Reports 2008

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Introduction

High tunnels are polyethylene-covered shelters being used in the vegetable industry to advance or extend the harvest season for many high-value crops. Unlike traditional greenhouses, no supplemental heating is used in high tunnels. In 2006, a study was initiated at the Iowa State University Armstrong Research Farm and the Horticulture Research Station to evaluate the potential for growing high-value floricanes and primocane type raspberries and blackberries in a high tunnel. The objectives were to determine if a high tunnel could be used to improve over-wintering of cold-sensitive floricanes, and if the harvest season of primocane types could be advanced far enough ahead that they could replace the floricanes in such a production system. A second objective was to determine if these crops could be grown in a high tunnel without pesticides or minimum pesticide usage. This report summarizes the results for the 2008 growing season.

Materials and Methods

In 2005, two 30 x 96 foot (2,880 sq ft) high tunnels with a 3-foot rafter spacing and roll-up side venting were acquired and erected at Armstrong and the Horticulture Station with half the area (30 x 48 ft) designated for growing fruit and the other half vegetables. In 2006, Tulameen (a non-hardy, high quality, floricanes red raspberry), Autumn Bliss (an early season primocane red raspberry), Ouachita (a non-hardy, thornless, floricanes blackberry) and Prime Jan (a newly developed, thorny, primocane blackberry) were planted in 10-foot plots spaced 6.5 feet apart in four rows running half the length of the high tunnel. Each cultivar was replicated four times in a randomized complete block design. Because of differences in plant vigor and primocane origin, initial plant spacing was as follows:

Cultivar	Primocane		Spacing (ft)
	Origin	Vigor	
Tulameen	rhizome	medium	2.5
Autumn Bliss	rhizome	medium	2.5
Ouachita	crown	very high	5.0
Prime Jan	rhizome	high	3.3

A companion planting consisting of the equivalent to one replication was established outdoors at Armstrong to compare harvest dates. A trellis was constructed to support the canes to a height of 6 feet, and water was supplied through trickle irrigation. Following the 2007 growing season, Prime Jan was removed from the trial because of excessive thorniness in a confined space and replaced with an advanced Arkansas selection that was not fruited in 2008.

During the 2007-08 winter, the tunnels were vented when inside temperature rose above 60 degrees F and closed when outside temperatures were predicted to drop below 15 degrees F. Tulameen and Ouachita canes were covered with straw mulch for additional protection. In the spring, the floricanes cultivars were pruned to optimize cane density as follows: Tulameen, 3 to 5 canes per foot, and Ouachita, 6 to 8 canes per crown. For Autumn Bliss, all canes were cut off at the ground.

Beginning in early-April at Armstrong and mid-April at the Horticulture Station, the high tunnels at both farms were allowed to warm up to begin the growing season. The sides were rolled up (manual at Armstrong, automated at Horticulture Station) to vent the tunnels when the inside temperature rose above 85 to 90 degrees F and closed when the inside temperature dropped below 65 degrees F. When Ouachita primocanes reached a height of 18 inches, they were pinched to induce lateral branching.

On May 25, June 27 and July 8, the tunnel at Armstrong was exposed to high winds in excess of

60 miles per hour. The covering was torn off on May 25 (Figure 3) and July 8, and partially torn on June 27.

Results and Discussion

At Armstrong, Autumn Bliss produced the highest accumulated yield per linear foot with no difference between Tulameen and Ouachita (Table 1). At the Horticulture Station, the yield of Ouachita and Autumn Bliss were similar and greater than Tulameen.

Compared to the 2007 production at Armstrong, Autumn Bliss was not as productive in 2008, while Tulameen and Ouachita were more productive. The increased production of Tulameen and Ouachita was because of better plant establishment and more canes per plot. However, even with straw mulch being applied to moderate the exposure to low winter temperatures in the tunnel, considerable cane dieback following pruning was observed at both sites on Tulameen. Ouachita canes came through the winter in better condition, but much breakage occurred when trying to lay them down in the fall to cover them with the straw mulch.

The production potential of Autumn Bliss and Ouachita was affected by an outbreak of *Botrytis* fruit rot that infected the blossoms and developing fruit at both farms (Figure 4). The infection was first observed around August 1, and because we were trying to grow the berries with minimum pesticide usage, no fungicides were applied to control the disease. By late August, weekly yields were greatly reduced (Figure 1). The disease was not a problem in the tunnels during 2007 at either farm. However, the 2007 growing season was warmer and drier in the late summer than in 2008. The tunnels were only vented on the sides, and it appears that more humidity was trapped in the tunnels at night to create a more favorable condition for the disease to develop. One needs to consider using fungicides to control *Botrytis* fruit

rot beginning at bloom when growing either raspberries or blackberries in a high tunnel. Also, one should consider taking measures that would allow venting the tunnel near the top.

Berry harvest at both farms began about a week later than in 2007. This delay was probably due to the loss of the cover at Armstrong on May 25, and the delay in closing the tunnel at the Horticulture Station. Compared to plants growing outdoors at Armstrong, Tulameen harvest in the tunnel began one week ahead of outdoors, while Autumn Bliss began two weeks ahead (Figure 1). The Early production of Autumn Bliss at the Horticulture Station was from floricanes, or canes that originated off of the below ground stubs of last year's primocanes, and not from primocanes developing from crown buds.

Ouachita produced the largest berries at both farms (Table 1). Autumn Bliss produced the

smallest berries, but average size was not significantly smaller than Tulameen berries. Tulameen berries exhibited a marked decline in size during the harvest season at both farms, while Autumn Bliss berries tended to be more uniform in size throughout the season, particularly at the Horticulture Station (Figure 2). Ouachita exhibited a variation in weekly berry size, particularly at Armstrong.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to FarmTek for donating the high tunnel used in this study, to the Wallace Foundation for Research and Rural Development and to the Foundation for its support. Thanks to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture for funding this study. Thanks to the staff at Armstrong and the Horticulture Station for their assistance in maintaining the study.

Table 1. Accumulated yield and average berry weight of Tulameen and Autumn Bliss raspberries, and Ouachita blackberries grown in high tunnels at Armstrong and the Horticulture Station in 2008.

Site/ Cultivar	Accumulated Yield			Average Berry Wt. (g)	Number of Berries (per oz)
	(lb/ft)	(lb/sq ft)	(lb/acre)		
<u>Armstrong:</u>					
Raspberries:					
Tulameen	1.47 bc	0.23	10,019	3.9 b	7.3
Autumn Bliss	2.67 a	0.41	17,860	2.8 bc	10.0
Blackberries:					
Ouachita	1.71 bc	0.26	11,326	6.5 a	4.4
<u>Horticulture Station:</u>					
Raspberries:					
Tulameen	1.04 c	0.16	6,970	3.5 bc	8.1
Autumn Bliss	2.21 ab	0.34	14,810	2.5 c	11.3
Blackberries:					
Ouachita	2.36 ab	0.36	15,816	7.7 a	3.7

²Mean separation by Tukey's HSD ($P=0.05$).

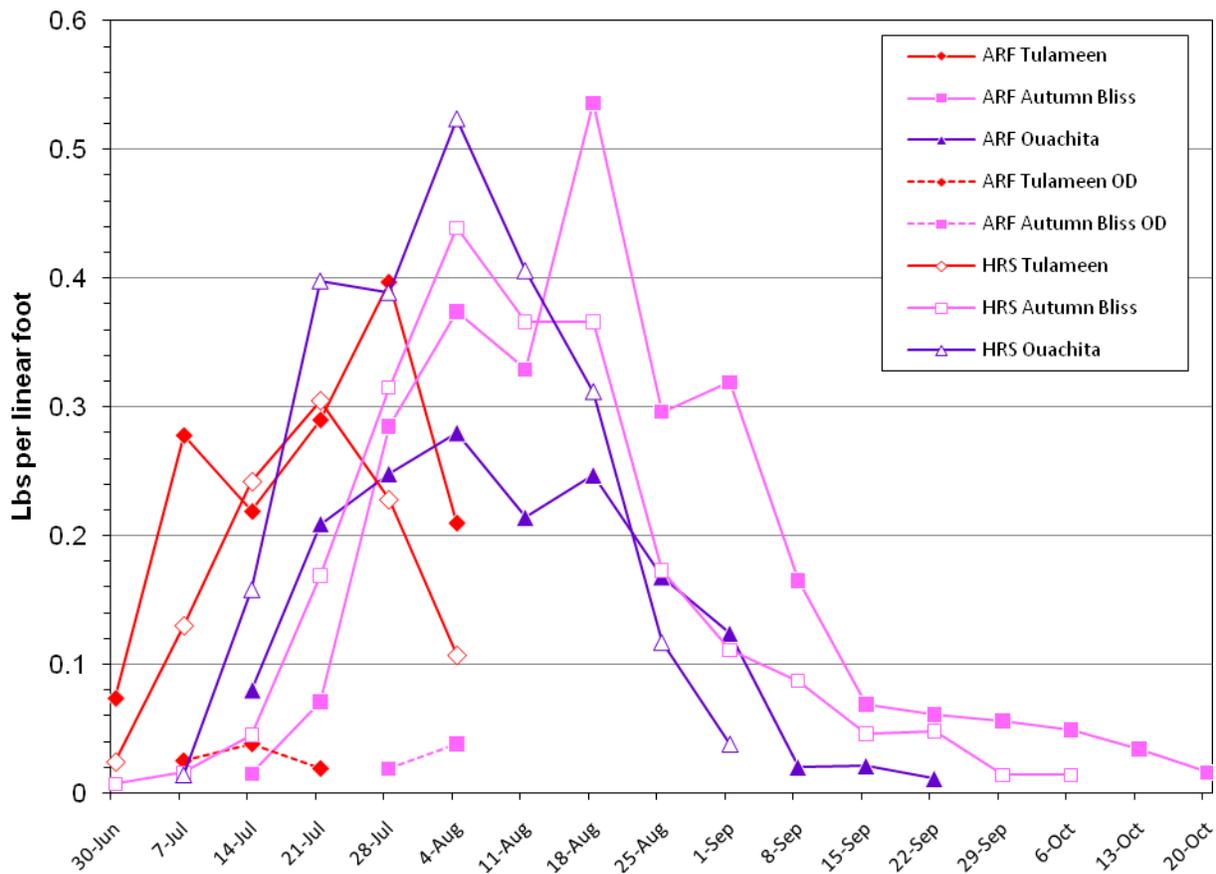


Figure 1. Weekly yield per linear foot of Tulameen and Autumn Bliss raspberries, and Ouachita blackberry grown in a high tunnel and outdoors (OD) at Armstrong and in a high tunnel at the Horticulture Station in 2008.

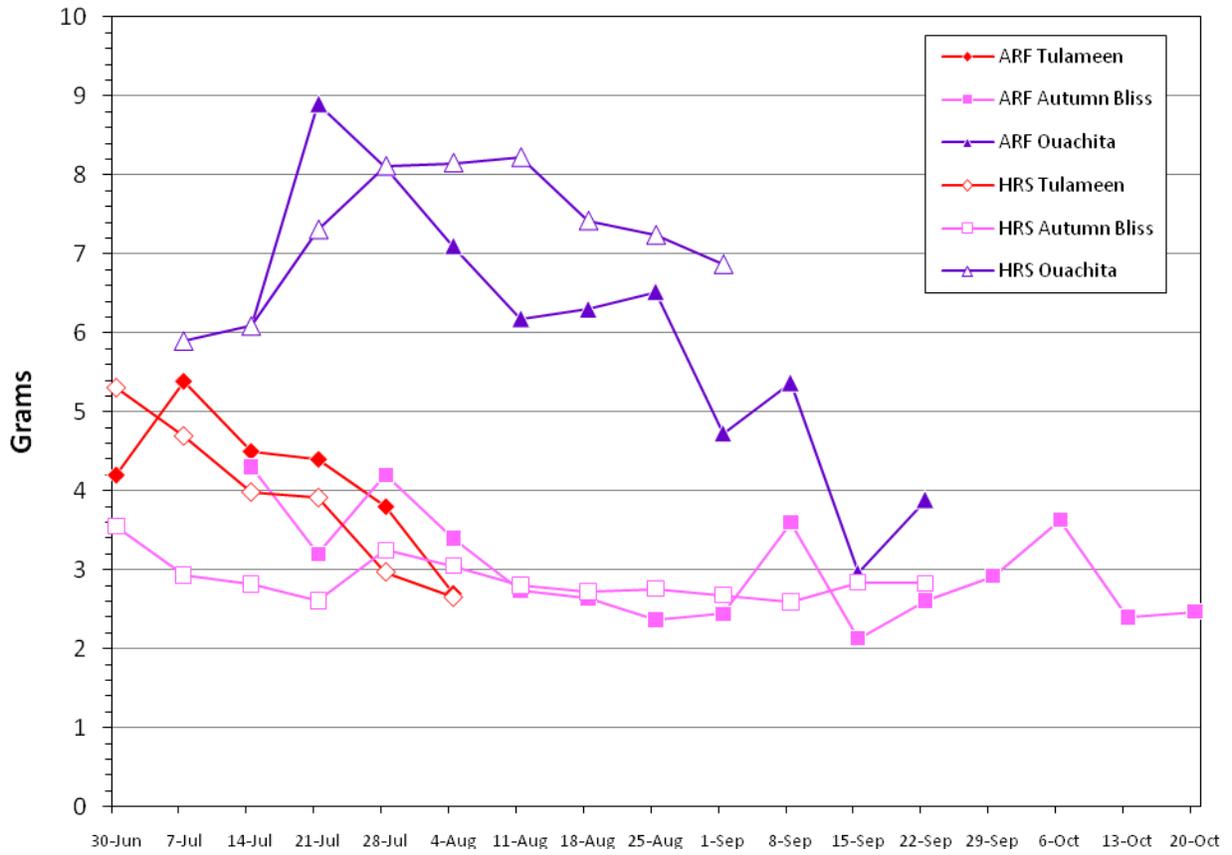


Figure 2. Weekly average berry weight of Tulameen and Autumn Bliss raspberries, and Ouachita blackberry grown in a high tunnel at Armstrong (ARF) and the Horticulture Station (HRS) in 2008.



Figure 3. Wind damage to the high tunnel at Armstrong on May 25, 2008.



Figure 4. *Botrytis* fruit rot on Autumn Bliss raspberry blossoms and developing fruit.