

# UK strawberries hit the shelves

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The first UK grown strawberries have been arriving on the supermarket shelves for a couple of weeks now, four weeks earlier than normal.

One of the growers of these very early berries is Wallings Nursery in Essex who have supplied the Sonata variety, a typical June bearer which can also be grown outside, in tunnels and glasshouses.

Christopher Batchelor from Wallings said that this year they took a bit of a gamble planting the plants before Christmas in the hope they were ready for planting at that time.

"We also have LED lighting and thermal screens to encourage them to grow faster. Weather has also played a part with good light levels," explained Batchelor.

Volumes are small, Batchelor said they have only picked around a thousand punnets this morning, it is a small area of 4000m<sup>2</sup>. The main production starts mid-April, May and June.



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"This is a speciality crop where we are trying to get some English crop into the system, the berries are supplied exclusively to Sainsburys who have been part of the project. Typically at this time of the year there is only Spanish and Moroccan fruit available. Demand for the strawberries has way outstripped supply," according to Batchelor.

Peak production will start the end of April/ beginning of May. Wallings has 3ha of glass production and 2ha of Spanish tunnels. Typically in spring they will produce 200 tonnes of Sonata and also Malling Sentenery, in summer another 100 tonnes. They are a small grower for supplying the niche market, going for quality and flavour.

In summer, Wallings deliver direct to local Sainsburys stores ensuring the fruit is very fresh and very local.