

Strawberry (Fragaria)



Full Sun



STRAWBERRY

Strawberries are hardy, perennial herbs grown throughout the United States and in most parts of Canada and in Alaska. They grow best in cool, moist states, and, with special treatment, strawberries can be grown in the hot Gulf states.

Although cultivated in Europe since about the sixteenth century, the strawberry was not truly popular as a fruit until the advent of the Hovey seedlings, grown in the vicinity of Boston about 1840. These are thought to have been developed from the species *F. vesca*, which is responsible for the late-bearing qualities of many

of today's ever-bearings.

If the soil is rich and the plants are given plenty of light and water, 100 feet of row will produce 50 to 75 quarts of spring strawberries.

Planting and Culture

Strawberries may be grown in any soil which is not too alkaline, too dry or in need of drainage. Best soil is a light, rich loam with plenty of humus and a pH factor between 5 and 6. If strawberries are to be planted in the spring, prepare their bed the previous fall on a plot which has been cultivated for two years. This will be free of the beetle grubs and wire-worms which may infest soil in which sod has recently been turned. A site which slopes slightly is best for perfect drainage.

Water must never be allowed to stand on a strawberry patch during the winter. A southern slope will encourage earlier blossoming and earlier fruit but this may not be desirable in areas where late frosts often nip the flower buds, unless protection can be given during such emergencies. Frostbitten blossoms may be distinguished by their darkened centers.

Barnyard manure may be turned under in fall at the rate of 500 pounds to each 1,000 square feet of proposed strawberry patch. At the same time compost or leaf mold may be stirred into the top layer of soil. If no manure is available, leaves and lawn clippings may be worked into the soil at the rate of five or six bushels to each 100 square feet, accompanied by liberal dressings of cottonseed or dried blood meal, ground phosphate rock and bone meal. Limestone should be avoided unless the soil is very acid. (i.e. below pH 5)

Planting

As soon as the soil is workable in spring, the plants may be set. The number of plants needed, provided space is not limited, may be calculated by the family capacity for strawberries, figured at the rate of 50 to 75 quarts of spring berries or 75 to 100 quarts of everbearing from 100 feet of row.

Young plants with vigorous roots should be used. First cut out damaged or diseased leaves or roots. The hole dug for each plant should be large enough to hold the roots without crowding. A

mound of soil is heaped in the center of the hole, and the plant seated on the mound with roots pressed firmly into the soil all around the base of the mound.

Each plant should be set so that the soil level will naturally cover all the roots, but will not cover any of the small leaves which are beginning to develop in the crown. The hole should be half-filled with soil. Pour water in to wash the soil around the roots. Then fill the rest of the hole and firm the soil around the plants.

A berry box or basket may be inverted over the newly set plant to prevent drying during the first few days. From beginning to end of the planting operation, the roots should never be exposed to sun or drying winds. If the day is sunny, the plants should at all times be shaded. A damp layer of sphagnum moss or a piece of wet burlap may be placed over the receptacle containing the plants to prevent drying. Remove one plant at a time. Soil should be kept moist for several days after the plants are set.

Watering

Strawberries need plenty of water, especially during their bearing period. Everbearing varieties such as Ogallala, Ozark Beauty and Gem should be kept moist during the entire summer in order to produce. A heavy mulch will help preserve soil moisture, but during periods of extreme drought it may be necessary to irrigate plants.

A test for soil moisture may be made by digging down six to 12 inches, taking a handful of soil, and forming a ball with it. If the soil forms a moist ball, no water is needed. If it breaks up and crumbles, the strawberries need additional water.

Mulch

Strawberries grown in the North must be mulched over the winter in order to prevent heaving or drying. The mulch should not be applied until the garden is frozen. If plants are covered too early, while the soil is still warm, they may be stimulated into new growth and will be more vulnerable to the cold when it comes. In the latitude of New York State the mulch should be placed over the bed during the latter part of November.

Straw or pine needles makes the best winter mulch. A layer about four inches deep should be placed over the entire bed. If the area is not usually covered with snow, it may be necessary to anchor the mulch with cornstalks or twigs.

When the weather begins to turn warm, and the ground thaws in March, the winter mulch should be first loosened, and then removed entirely. It may be stacked beside the garden to use later as summer mulch after the bed has been renovated.

Diseases and Insects

Strawberry diseases are best controlled by the following sanitary practices:

1. Select varieties that grow vigorously and are resistant to diseases in your area.
2. Buy disease-free stock from reputable nurseries that sell plants monitored by state plant inspection services.
3. Rotate your berry patch regularly or, in the case of the permanent bed, replace old plants with runner plants each year.

Red stele, the most serious fungus disease of strawberries in the United States, causes plants to wilt and sometimes die just before fruit starts to ripen. Like other fungi, it is most active in wet weather, and may sometimes disappear in warm, sunny weather. Fruit from affected plants is small, sour and few in number. Control is best achieved by removing any plants with coarse roots with no branching rootlets, by correcting any faulty drainage that may exist in the bed and, most important, by planting resistant varieties.

Verticillium wilt, another fungus disease active in cool, humid weather, causes the margins of the outer leaves to dry up and turn dark brown so that plants appear dry and flattened. If you suspect verticillium wilt in your area, do not plant strawberries in soil in which tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, or other strawberries have grown in the last two years. Varieties that display best resistance to verticillium are Blakemore, Catskill, Guardian, Redchief, Sunrise, and Surecrop.

Insects that may threaten strawberries include two kinds of aphids—the leaf aphid and the strawberry-root aphid—and two kinds of mites—the cyclamen and the spider mites.

Root weevils and crown borers also appear occasionally. Best control of all strawberry pests is to shred plants and plow the patch each fall, then locate your new patch at least 300 feet away, if possible.