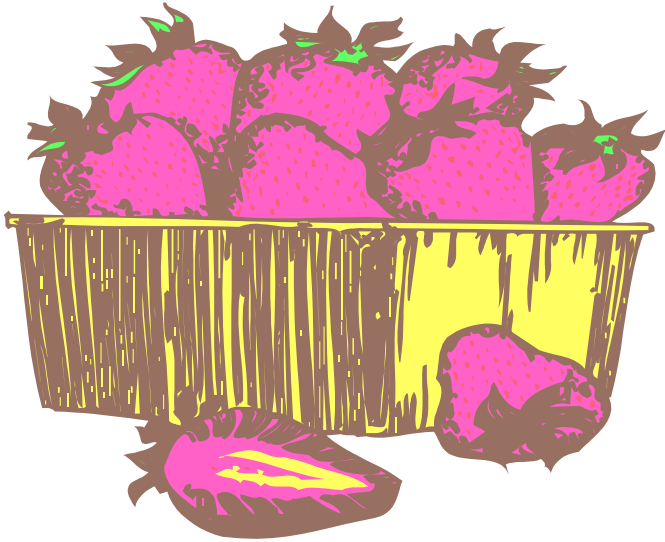




Time and Hints to Take Home

Strawberries



A place can be found in just about anyone's garden for a patch of strawberries. They are easy to grow and fresh berries are a real treat! Two dozen plants will supply a family of four with fresh berries plus some for preserves.

Types of Strawberries: You will find that strawberries are labeled as *day neutral*, *everbearing* or *June bearing*. Which type you select depends on what you plan to do with the berries you harvest. Most types are considered relatively short lived so you must plan to re-do your strawberry patch about every five years.

Day neutrals are an everbearing kind of strawberry which flower and set fruit with little regard for day length. They will start to produce fruit in June and continue into early fall. The berries tend to be smaller and not as sweet. This type is good if you want fresh berries all summer. They tend to produce few runners but have a much longer lifespan.

Everbearing plants will only produce fruit when the days are at least 12 hours long. Harvest tends to peak in early summer then continue with lighter harvests on through the early fall. The berry size and sugar content of the peak harvest is best. The fruit size, sweetness and quantity decrease over the season. This type is good for both preserving (the peak crop) and a long supply of fresh fruit for eating. Everbearers can also tolerate some light shade.

June bearing types produce one crop per year, in late spring or early summer. Plant this type of strawberry for preserving or freezing since they give you all their fruit at

once. June bearing strawberries are larger and sweeter than other types, but you only receive one large crop a year. This type produces the most runners because it is also the type with the shortest lifespan. You must encourage runners to keep a bed producing fruit and more general upkeep is needed.

Note: June bearers typically must be ordered via catalog, they are not stocked in the nursery.

Site Selection and Planting: Strawberries need as much sun as possible, 6 hours or more a day. The site needs to drain well but it is important that it has good soil that will not dry out too quickly. Raised beds work great for strawberries. You should prepare the bed well, tilling in lots of compost to make rich soil. It is a good idea to mulch your strawberry bed to keep fruit clean and weeds out. Grass clippings (chemical free) work especially well. Strawberries are very sensitive to chemicals used for weed control so we do not advise their use. New products that contain corn gluten as their primary agent are a good choice for strawberries.

Strawberries are purchased as bare root plants in spring or early summer. You can plant strawberries as soon as the ground can be worked. They should be kept cool and damp until they are planted. Try to get them in the ground as soon as possible after they are purchased.

When you plant the strawberries, set plants carefully in the ground so that the crown (just above where the roots meet the plant) is at soil level, the top of the roots should be $\frac{1}{4}$ inch beneath the soil. If the crown is below the soil, the plant will rot, if the roots are above the soil they will dry out and the plant will die. Spread the roots out in a circle so that the plant establishes itself well. After planting, keep the plants moderately moist but be careful not to let them get soggy.

You should move your strawberry patch to another part of the garden when it needs rejuvenating. Do not plant in an area where tomatoes, peppers, eggplants or potatoes have grown recently. You can harvest young plants from your patch but be sure to buy some new ones too to keep the gene pool fresh.

There are three 'systems' for planting strawberries. Each has its good and bad points so a gardener has to decide what would work best in their garden.

The Hill System: This system is ideal for a gardener with limited space but it does require more plants. It works very well for ever-bearers and June bearers. Place plants 9" apart in a double row, leaving 9" between the rows. Between each set of double rows, leave an aisle of 2-3'. Pinch off all runners to avoid crowding. This system typically produces well for 3-6 years. You will notice that yields start to drop off when it is time to start a new bed.

The Matted Row System: This system provides a high yield but it can be short lived. Set plants 2' apart in single rows and leave 4' between rows. Let the plants send out runners and root 'daughter' plants freely but till the aisle periodically so that the plant row stays about 18" wide. The bed will fill in with many plants that will be very productive but they will exhaust themselves in about 3 years. Weed control can also become an issue.

The Spaced Row System: This system is a more controlled version of the last one. Set plants 2' apart in single rows and leave 4' between rows. Allow only 4 runners per plant to root. Cut off any other runners. This system will produce for 4-6 years. With this last method, you can alternate between plant rows and paths every time you rejuvenate your bed.

Strawberries need frequent deep soaking, especially when they are bearing fruit. Feed strawberries after they fruit or in the fall. Any well-balanced fertilizer will do. Slow release fertilizers are preferred over compost or manure. They can cause soft fruit.

You may need to protect your strawberries from pests like birds or slugs. Plastic netting placed over the entire bed is a good method to prevent birds from stealing your crop. Diatomaceous earth spread around the perimeter of the bed is a relatively worry free non-toxic solution for slugs. You can also use chemical slug baits but follow all label precautions. Note that it can be attractive and harmful to pets.

Each fall when you are ready to clean up your strawberry patch, you can run the lawn mower over it to remove the leaves and debris. Be sure the blade is set high so you won't damage the crowns of your plants. We recommend

mulching your strawberries with straw or leaves in winter for protection. Wait until we have had several hard freezes before applying mulch. Remove the mulch in early spring.

Strawberries also make excellent container plants. It is best to select day neutral varieties for this type of planting. You may have seen multi-pocket 'strawberry pots' for sale. One plant per pocket and three or four in the top is enough for one or two people. They also work in hanging baskets. Plants grown in containers are only good for one season, though. They will not survive in the pots over the winter.

The following varieties are recommended by Plant Land.

Everbearing Varieties

Fort Laramie: This USDA release is extremely winter hardy. The large, bright scarlet fruit has a dark pink to scarlet interior. The firm, sweet flesh is very aromatic. This is a good choice for eating, freezing and preserves.

Quinault: A Washington State release that is also very hardy. It is a large berry, firm and deep red with good flavor. While it is good for fresh eating and preserves, it is not recommended for freezing. The yield is high on vigorous plants.

Day Neutral Varieties

Tribute: This is a University of Maryland release. The mediums to large, wedge shaped berries have bright red skin and light to medium red flesh. The flavor is acidic but pleasant. This selection is best for fresh eating and has good processing quality for sales. It is very disease resistant. Production may be less in the hottest days of summer but will resume with cooler temperatures.

One last note, do not wash or remove the stems from your strawberries until you are ready to eat them. This will prolong their life in the refrigerator. The staff at Plant Land can answer any further questions you may have.