

STRAWBERRY CULTURE

Strawberries are certainly among the most rewarding of the small fruits to grow. Who can resist popping a ripe red berry into one's mouth and savoring that sun-drenched flavor? And so many ways to enjoy them- pies, shortcake, jam, and more. Choosing when, where and how to plant and care for strawberries is important to success. Here's what you need to know.

Preparation:

- pH should range between 6.5 and 6.8
- Do not plant where tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, or potatoes have been grown for 3 years. Soil pathogens from the nightshade family can linger that long.
- Choose a sunny, adequately drained site.
- I apply an all natural fertilizer (Espoma Garden-tone or Bio-tone Starter), one cup in a 15' linear row. I turn that under to a depth of 8" and rake smooth. Do not use conventional fertilizer at this time, as it can burn tender roots.

Planting:

- Using a trowel, dig a hole for each plant deep enough to accommodate the plant without bending the roots.
- Set plant with roots straight down and with crown at existing soil level. Do not plant too deep or too shallow
- Press firmly in.
- There are several choices (see diagrams) for the spacing of plants, as your bed will last for at least three years. However, it is recommended that ever-bearing varieties (day-neutrals) be treated as annuals for best results.
- I like the spaced matted row technique for spacing. This requires the original (mother) plants to be spaced 18-20" apart. When runners appear later in the season, allow only 4 to take hold, and remove subsequent ones. This allows for good air circulation, excellent production, and ease of picking. If you plant more than one row, make sure rows are 3-4' apart.
- Water thoroughly after plants are set.

Maintenance:

- Fertilize 6-8 weeks after planting, At this time you can use a conventional 10-10-10 fertilizer at ½ lb./100 sq. ft. I use Garden-tone again. Note that ever-bearing varieties should be fertilized every two weeks to maintain production.
- Keep weed-free.
- Maintain good moisture throughout growing season. Strawberries do not like drought!
- Don't let runners get ahead of you.
- Remove all blossoms the first year so that energy can go directly to good establishment.

Winter protection:

- Strawberries need to be mulched with straw over the winter months to protect against winter injury. Wait until several hard frosts have occurred (usually after Thanksgiving). Then apply 6” of straw over your bed, and say goodnight!
- Don’t uncover strawberries too early. I wait until end of April and maybe early May. If plants start to push out early flowers with spring warmth, it is likely those flowers will get nipped by frost. You have then lost that berry. The yellow center of the bloom will turn blackish if it’s been frosted, and that’s the indicator. Remember, our average last frost date is May 23.

Looking for some great diagrams on planting strawberries? [Visit Nourse Farms Website!](#)