

Growing Strawberries

They are not called strawberries because it is common to grow or mulch them in straw as one would think. The name comes from the Old English word, strew, thus strawberry, as in berries strewn along the ground. Strawberries are one of the most popular garden fruits. You only need a small area of the home garden to achieve plentiful production. They will also do well in boxes, barrels or tubs. A good rule of thumb is 5 plants per person in the family.

It used to be that strawberries were only available as dormant plants in late winter. Today, they are available almost year-round. Strawberries thrive in full sun and want good air circulation and water drainage. The more sun, the better, for this is what makes the fruit sweet. The plants will grow in a variety of soils as long as it is on the acid side. Their preference is for soil rich in organic matter.

Clay and sandy soils will produce good crops with the addition of EB Stone Loam Builder or Azalea Camellia Gardenia Mix (2cu ft/100 sq. ft.). Apply EB Stone Fruit Berry and Vine Food or All Purpose fertilizer to new beds at the rate of (1 lb./100 sq. ft.). Space the plants 8 to 12 inches apart, with rows about 1 to 2 feet apart. Set plants with the crown above soil level and the topmost roots beneath about ¼ inch of soil. Forest Mulch Plus will help control weeds and conserve moisture.

Strawberries require ample water, as they have shallow roots. Irrigate immediately upon planting and always keep moist during flowering and fruiting by providing frequent soakings. Fertilize with the foods listed above in spring as growth commences

and again at the end of the first flush of fruit. Avoid heavy or constant feeding as this produces more foliage than flower and overly soft fruit that will rot easily.

There are two main types of strawberry plants, June bearing and everbearing (or day neutral). June bearing types, such as Sequoia and Chandler, produce a single crop in late spring or early summer and in general, are the highest quality. Everbearing types usually reach peak production in early summer, but continue to produce through fall. Our favorite everbearing varieties are Albion, Seascape, and Quinault. During the first year, both types will form limited fruit. Pinch off early blossoms to promote the growth of the plants themselves. During the fall, when days become short and cool, the June bearing types will form flower buds. These buds are dormant during the winter and in the spring will flower and fruit more or less at the same time. When fruiting stops, the plants will start making new runners and plants for the next season. Everbearing types are in fruit production more or less continually at the same time new runners and plants are being produced. They are not dependent on short days and the cool temperatures of autumn for flower formation. Replace old everbearing plants every other year (every 3 years for June bearing plants).

Strawberries are hardy enough for all but record Bay Area cold temperatures. Straw (3-4 inches deep) is the most common, and name appropriate, winter mulch used to prevent frost injury. Shredded paper or floating row covers will also do the trick.



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