

Growing your own Strawberries



Planning

- Strawberry plants bear fruit their second season.
- Plan to set your new plants out in early spring, just as the trees start to leaf out.
- For best yields, start a new bed/row of plants each year and take out bed/rows that have fruited.

Preparation

- Strawberries do best in a site that offers full sun, good drainage and air circulation.
- Apply aged manure and a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-10 (1 pound per 50-foot row) before planting in the spring.

Planting

- Space your rows 4 feet apart.
- Trim the roots of the new plants to no more than 6 inches long. Soak the roots in water for about an hour before planting.
- Set the plants 18 inches apart in the rows.
- Dig holes in the ground deep enough so the roots are covered but the crown isn't buried. Pack the soil against the roots and add about 1/2 pint of water mixed with a diluted soluble fertilizer.

Care

- First year, spring: Keep the bed free of weeds. Pick off blossoms to prevent fruiting and encourage production of healthy daughter plants.
- Late spring: 5 to 6 weeks after planting, train daughter plants to take root in a 9-by-9-inch spaced row system.
- Late spring and summer: Side-dress with ammonium nitrate (1/2 pound per 100-foot row), 5-10-10 (2 1/2 pounds per 100-foot row), or manure tea (1/2 to 1 pint per plant). Side-dress again 1 month later.
- Late fall: After a few freezes, mulch with 5 to 6 inches of straw or 4 to 5 inches of pine needles.
- Second year, late spring: Remove the mulch gradually in spring, but protect blossoms from late frost with covers of mulch, if needed. Provide 1 inch of water per week while the fruit is developing, through harvest.
- Cover the patch with frost cloth or strawberry netting to keep birds out.
- Summer: After harvest, till the plants under, plant a cover crop, and prepare the bed for new plants next spring.

Harvesting

- The berries will ripen about 1 month after the plants bloom. Expect 2 to 3 weeks of harvesting for each variety.
- Pick the plants clean every 2 or 3 days. Avoid the green-tipped berries; they're not fully ripe.
- When harvesting, don't leave berry remnants on the plants. They encourage plant rot.