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STRAWBERRIES

Strawberries *(Fragaria ananassa)* are considered an herbaceous perennial. New shoots, leaves and runners emerge from the crown and root structure each year. Homeowners can plan on 4 to 5 years of healthy growth and productive fruiting.

Planting Site

- Strawberries must have at least six hours of direct sunlight to produce quality fruit.
- Avoid planting in a known frost pocket. Strawberries bloom early and blossoms may be damaged by frost. In very cold areas, day-neutral cultivars offer an option as they bloom over a long period of time.
- Plants are highly susceptible to Verticillium wilt and should not be grown in areas previously planted with potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers or black raspberries.

Soil

- Strawberries grow best in loamy sandy soil, but they can be grown in almost any soil that is well drained and contains organic matter. If possible prepare the soil the fall before planting with compost or animal manure and consider planting a cover crop for both weed control and organic matter.

pH

- The optimum pH for strawberries is 5.0 to 6.5; however, most varieties will tolerate a pH as high as 7.5. Reduce pH by incorporating peat moss or sulfur 6-8" into soil before planting.
- Using ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) as a nitrogen source also lowers the pH. As a rule of thumb, add one-half pound of ammonium sulphate (21-0-0) for each 100 square feet of planting bed.

Drainage

- Wet soils can lead to root diseases, frost heaving and fruit rots. Raised beds or pyramids offer options if berries are to be grown on heavier soil with slow drainage.

Planting

- Use certified virus-free stock. Resist the temptation to plant runners from your own plants or a neighbor's healthy-appearing plants.
- Plant dormant stock late March to April. Set out potted plants in May.
- Setting out dormant plants. Trim roots 4 to 5 inches long. Dig a hole or trench 6 inches deep. Spread roots in a fan with the crown at soil surface. Press soil firmly against roots.

Mulching

- Mulching with two to three inches of straw or four to five inches of pine needles along the rows during the summer conserves moisture and prevents many weeds. Check occasionally to be sure soil isn't becoming waterlogged.

- Before a hard freeze, mulch plants with pine needles or straw to protect plants from drying winds and help prevent soil heaving.
- Take mulch off **early** in the spring before new growth begins. The mulch can be pulled away from plants and used as summer mulch. Be prepared to cover plants if an unexpected hard frost is forecast.
- If plants have heaved out of the ground during winter, firm them back into the ground and replace soil over the exposed roots.

Watering

- Water soon after planting and keep plants well watered through the first year.
- Water is critical before and during harvest and in late August when flower buds are formed for the next year.
- Avoid over watering. Waterlogged soils encourage root rots.
- Overhead watering during harvesting time may encourage fruit rot.
- Mulches and drip irrigation systems adapt to strawberry culture and conserve water.

Harvesting

- Harvest berries in early morning if possible and place in the refrigerator immediately.
- Do not wash the berries before refrigerating unless you will use the fruit within a few hours.
- Picking berries when they are wet or cooling them with water hastens fruit rot.
- With optimum conditions, fresh strawberries have a shelf life of about seven days.

CHOOSING STRAWBERRIES FOR THE HOME GARDEN

JUNE-BEARERS

June-bearers are among the most productive of strawberries. They form flower buds in the fall and bear one heavy crop the next spring or early summer. Remove all blossoms the year of planting to strengthen plants. After harvesting renovate strawberry beds by mowing off the leaves, taking care not to damage the crowns. Renovation stimulates new plant growth and reduces disease problems.

Fertilizing

Before planting, incorporate 2 pounds of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 fertilizer or ¾ pound 21-0-0 ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet into the soil.

In August side dress with ½ pound of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) per 100 square feet.

June-bearing cultivars

Hood Early mid-season, good fresh or for preserves. Poor frozen, resistant to root rots and mildew. Moderately susceptible to viruses. Easy to pick, little fruit rot.

Shuksan Mid-season, ripens a week after Hood. Good fresh or frozen. Moderately resistant to root rot. fruit rot, mildew and viruses.

Benton Late mid-season, ripens 10 days after Hood. Very good fresh, fair frozen. Has a long harvest season. Resistant to root rots, mildew, viruses and fruit rot.

Rainier Late mid-season, ripens 10 days after Hood. Excellent fresh or frozen and in preserves. Becomes dark quickly in hot weather. Somewhat susceptible to fruit rot. Resistant to root rots, mildew and viruses.

Note: For flavor, Rainier and Shuksan are considered the best.

EVERBEARERS AND DAY-NEUTRALS

Everbearers and day-neutrals have the same general culture. Because day-neutrals set fruit all season long and total yields are higher, their cultivars are replacing everbearers.

Everbearers bear fruit twice during the growing season, generally during the spring and in late summer.

Everbearer cultivars
Quinault Reliable, good quality, but soft. Size and yield drops off after the first flush of large fruit.
Ogalalla Very hardy, but small, soft and of fair quality.

Day-neutrals will set fruit the year they are planted. Because these cultivars set flower buds regardless of day length, they set fruit from spring to fall. They produce few runners and can be planted either in short rows or in hills.

Day-neutrals are sensitive to extreme heat so fruit production generally drops during July and August. They are often replaced after 2 fruiting years as vigor and the fruit size declines.

Day-neutral cultivars
Tillicum Very productive, good quality, medium-size berry.
Tribute and Tristar Productive, very good quality, medium-size berry.
Hector Productive, good quality, medium-to-large size berry.

General culture for ever-bearers and day-neutrals
Remove blossoms until June 1 to promote a larger harvest. Keep well watered through fall. Remove old, weak plants and excess runners each fall.

Fertilizing
Before planting, incorporate 2 pounds of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 fertilizer or 3/4 pound 21-0-0 ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet into the soil.

Beginning before bloom in April, side dress with one-eight pound of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) per 100 square feet per month until mid-August.

Resources
More information on growing strawberries is available in the booklet “Berries for the Inland Northwest”. For information on this booklet call WSU Extension at 477-2048.

Compiled by Tonie Fitzgerald. For more information, contact Master Gardeners at (509) 477-2181.
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