

GROWING STRAWBERRIES

The strawberry (*Fragaria hybrida*) is derived from several species originating in the Americas and Europe. 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 strewberry, as in berries strewn along the ground. Strawberries belong to the Rose Family (Rosaceae) and 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.

Set out dormant plants early in the spring. Strawberries thrive in full sun and want good air circulation and water drainage. 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 Mix (2cu ft/100 sq. ft.). Apply an 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. Mulch will help control weeds and conserve moisture. Runners will begin to emerge in 6 to 8 weeks and will form new plants as they root. Individual plants spread to 1 foot across. Soon there will be a succession of new plants forming buds.

Strawberries require ample water, as they have shallow roots. Irrigate immediately upon planting and always keep moist during flowering and fruiting by providing frequent, deep soakings. Once beds are established, feed with a 16-16-16 fertilizer (1 lb./25 sq. ft.) or a combination of Blood Meal and Fruit and Vegetable Food at the same rate. This feeding regimen can be used in spring as growth commences and again at the end of the first flush of fruit. Do it again in late summer or early fall before next years flower buds have formed.

There are two main types of strawberry plants, June bearing and Everbearing (or day neutral). June bearing types 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.

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 production is over and the plants are vegetative, they are making new runners and plants for the next season. Everbearing types are in fruit production more or less continually as 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. If the temperature goes below 15°, the flower buds can be harmed and yields will be

reduced. Straw (3-4 inches deep) is the most common, and name appropriate, winter mulch used to prevent injury. Shredded paper or floating row covers will also do the trick.