

Planting Strawberries

Site selection: Strawberries do well in any good garden soil; however, a well-drained area is best. Avoid low-lying areas where spring frosts are likely to injure the early blossoms.

Preparation of the soil: Work soil as early as weather permits in the Spring. Try to work the ground to a depth of 6-8". Incorporating well-decomposed organic matter (cotton boll compost or well-rotted manure) into the planting bed will improve the water holding capacity of the soil and the drainage. Strawberries like reasonably rich soil. Sandy to slightly gravelly soils are ideal. They prefer a slightly acid soil pH of 5.0- 6.0. Plant either in early Spring or early Fall. An individual strawberry plant requires one square foot of space. They



produce runners (horizontal stems with new plants along their length), so if plants are set a foot apart, all runners will need to be trimmed as they form. Alternatively, plants can be planted a couple of feet apart and allow the runners to fill the space in between.

Planting: When planting, fan out the roots if purchased bare-root, and set the crown just above the soil line. If planted deeper, the crown will rot; any shallower and the roots will dry out.

Fertilizing: For new Spring or Fall plantings, side-dress ten days after setting out plants with Ferti-lome Gardeners Special, keep at least 4 inches from the plant crown. For established plants, fertilize early in Spring and again in late Summer as strawberries initiate their flower buds in the Fall, and the next season's berries develop from food stored in the crown. Another option is to use a complete slow-release fertilizer, such as Osmocote (lasting 4-5 months), which needs to be applied only once in the Spring. However, do not fertilize excessively in Spring, especially before harvest, as fruit rot and poor fruit quality may result.

Types of Strawberries: June-bearing plants produce a single crop each year. Generally speaking, these are the largest and highest quality strawberries grown. To encourage vigorous growth and strong plants, remove blossoms and runners that appear the first year plants are set out.

Ever-bearing plants produce one crop during a regular season and another in the Fall, with a few fruits in between. The first year they are planted, it is best to remove blossoms and runners on everbearers until July. This will encourage them to produce more vigorous plants and yield a heavier Fall crop. For Everbearers, fertilize (1 lb. / 100 sq. ft.) mid-season.

Mulching, Winter Protection: A three-inch layer of hay mulch applied right before hard freezing occurs gives winter protection to your plant but also keeps down grasses and weeds. When the plants show growth in the early Spring, remove most of the mulch, leaving enough mulch to cover between the beds. This will help cut down on rot.