

PLANTING STRAWBERRIES

A One-hundred-foot row of strawberries should meet the needs of a family of four. Everbearers give the best crop the year they are planted, whereas June bearers give the best crop the year following planting.

Do not plant strawberries where strawberries, tomatoes, peppers or eggplants have grown for the last four years because they are all susceptible to non-treatable verticillium wilt, which stays in the soil.

Strawberries grow best in a sunny location with sandy loam, well-drained soils. Before planting, test the soil to determine the pH and fertilizer needs. Strawberries grow best in soil with a pH of 5.8 to 6.5.

Plant the strawberries as soon as they arrive, and the soil can be worked in the spring. Early spring planting promotes the formation of highly productive runner plants. Plant the crown at soil level and spread the roots out like a fan, firming the soil around them. If set too deep, the crown will rot.

In the fall, build up the organic matter content of the soil by adding manure, lawn clippings, sawdust or compost. Remove all weeds in the autumn, either with an herbicide or mechanically. Weeds can be a major headache once the strawberries are planted because control is limited to hand pulling.

The matted row is the most common planting system for June-bearers. Set plants 22-24 inches apart in rows spaced 3-4 feet apart. Allow runners to form a mat 15-18 inches wide with the runner plants spaced 4-6 inches apart. Keep at least 18 inches between the matted rows. Allowing plants to mat together results in small, inferior berries. Plant Everbearers in the hill system. Set plants 12-15 inches apart in double or triple rows. Remove runners as they appear.

About two weeks after planting, use 2-3 pounds of a complete fertilizer, such as 12-12-12, per 100 feet of row. Repeat again in 4-6 weeks if the plants lack vigor. Strawberry plants can be side dressed. When side dressing, the fertilizer should not come into contact with damp foliage or be placed closer than four inches from the plants. Frequent, shallow cultivation, and hand hoeing are necessary at this time, primarily for weed control.

Remove the flower stalks as soon as they appear on new June-bearers. Allowing the plants to bloom and set fruit the first year reduces runner formation and production the next year. Remove blossoms of everbearing varieties for the first 60-80 days. Then allow the plants to set fruit.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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