

## Strawberries for Your Garden



April's mild weather is perfect for planting strawberries, which grow best when started in soils that are neither hot nor cold. Strawberries are particularly popular among gardeners. A bed of 25 to 50 plants produces enough for an average-sized family. The fruit is tasty and nutritious. One cup of berries contains the recommended daily dose of Vitamin C, and it's high in folic acid with only 55 calories.

Strawberries prefer well-drained soils high in organic matter. Before planting, spread high-phosphorus fertilizer in the bed to promote good root production for new plants. Trim bareroot plants and spread them evenly in the planting hole. Firm soil over the roots, leaving the crown even with the soil surface. Remove all broken or moldy leaves, allowing only one or two green leaves, then water.

Train strawberries to a matted row system, placing plants 18 to 24 inches apart in rows 36 to 42 inches wide. Allow plant runners to fill in the empty spaces, but maintain at least 12 to 18 inches of space between rows to create a path for maintenance and picking. Mulch beds with straw or organic material to control weeds and conserve moisture.

There are three types of good garden strawberries. "June-bearers" develop flowers in early spring from buds initiated in the fall. The plants must have a well-developed leaf canopy in the fall to produce sufficient energy for flower buds to form. June-bearers are heavy producers but must be protected from frost in the spring when flowering.

Most gardeners prefer "everbearers" and "day-neutral" strawberries that produce throughout the growing season. Everbearers give fruit in spring and fall while day-neutrals produce in summer as well. Pick flowers off plants during the first spring planting to promote a strong root system. Make light nitrogen fertilizer applications after harvesting in the spring. Do not apply insecticides unless absolutely necessary, because bees pollinate strawberries.

Pick berries in the cool morning to prolong shelf life. Berries cease to ripen after harvest, so pick when fully ripe. When harvesting, cup the berry between fingers and snap berry and hull cleanly off the plant. Keep berries out of the sun and refrigerate unwashed until needed. Berries can be hulled and cleaned before eating, freezing, or processing.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact Ken Churches at [cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu) or (209) 754-6475 with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5696, Amador (209) 223-6837, El Dorado (530) 621-5543.