

Growing Strawberries



Where To Plant

Strawberries need sunlight during most of the day to develop the best size, color and flavor. Do not plant strawberries near trees or shrubs that will offer too much shading or compete for soil nutrients and water.

When To Plant

In the local areas, strawberries may be planted at any time desired and plants are available. Winter and Spring plantings will begin to produce the first season, but crops will be more abundant the next year. Summer and Fall plantings will require a little extra maintenance to get them well started, but will reward you with good harvests the first bearing season. You may even have a small crop that Fall—if you beat the birds to the berries.

Varieties

Choose from Sequoia, Tioga, Quinalt, Fort Laramie Ozark Beauty and Eversweet, plus new hybrids such as Seascape, Diamante and Albion. These excellent varieties do well in California, although some are best adapted to the central coast producing areas.

Soil Preparation And Planting

Work the soil thoroughly until it is well pulverized to a depth of 8-10 inches, working in one bag of **Master Nursery Pay Dirt** per 50 square feet, plus **Master Nursery Master Start** or **E.B. Stone Organics Sure Start Fertilizer** at one cup per 10 feet of row.

Raised beds are desirable near the coast, but are not essential in the intermediate and central valley areas. Set the plants 12-14 inches apart in single rows on top of beds that are at least 5-6 inches high and 5-6 inches wide on top. Space the beds at least 24 inches apart from center to center. Where no beds are used, set the plants 12 inches apart and allow about 24 inches between rows.

Examine the plants before planting. If they look wilted or dry, soak them in water for an hour or so. Drain and plant immediately, or keep the plants damp until you are ready.

To make planting easier, cut the roots back to about 4-6 inches long (see illustration below). Open a V-shaped hole with a spade or trowel. Insert the roots, spread them out fan-shaped, and cover the hole with soil, firming it carefully about the roots. The upper part of the crown should be slightly above the surface of the ground. Irrigate immediately after planting to settle the soil around the roots and to replace lost moisture.



Irrigation

Since strawberry plants have shallow roots, they need moisture throughout the growing season. To irrigate raised-bed plantings on level ground, simply fill the furrows between the beds with water from your hose. Use sprinklers on flat-bed plantings, wetting the soil to a depth of 12-15 inches. To reduce the danger of fruit rot, water early in the morning so the berries can dry off during the warm daylight hours. A drip system can be utilized to great effect for row irrigation in both raised-bed and flat-bed plantings. [See information on Drip Systems]

Harmful salts may accumulate in raised beds irrigated by furrows. Wash these out of the beds by irrigating with sprinklers during the period when there is no fruit on the plants. This may be necessary at least once or twice during the Summer months. Usually enough rain falls in the Winter to leach out most of the salts in the surface soil.

Mulching And Cultivating

To keep the berries clean and reduce infestation of fruit rots, mulch should be applied around the plants. Good mulching materials include perforated black plastic, a thin layer of straw, or an inch or two of pine shavings or sawdust.

Cultivate non-mulched areas at regular intervals to keep weeds under control. Tillage tools should not penetrate soil more than 2 or 3 inches to avoid cutting the roots of the plants.

Cut off all runners as they develop, except those kept to replace dead or weak plants in the row.

Fertilizing

In addition to the original soil preparation, fertilizer should be added at least three or more times a year. Make the first additional application when new growths start in the Spring (usually late January, early February or early March), the second in mid-May, and the final application in late-July to mid-September.

Used at the suggested rates, any of the following fertilizers will give satisfactory results.

- **Master Nursery Formula 49** at 3-4 pounds per 100 square feet.
- **E.B. Stone Organics Citrus & Fruit Tree Food** at 2 pounds (6 cups) per 100 square feet.

Apply the fertilizer in a band 2 or 3 inches wide on either side of the row, lightly cultivate (plastic mulch prohibits this), then irrigate to dissolve the fertilizer, making it available to the plants.

Pest Control

Aphids, spider mites and cyclamen mites, the most common pests of strawberries, may be found on plants at any time during the growing season. Red spider mites and other tiny mites spin fine webs on the underside of the leaves. They feed on the leaves, causing them to turn gray. Infested plants lack vigor and bear only a few small berries. These pests can be controlled with **Safer Sulfur Spray**.

Snails and slugs are the other common problem and can be controlled with regular applications of **SLUGGO Slug and Snail Bait**, applied around the planting bed.

