



Strawberries for the Home Garden

Quick Facts...

- Strawberries are classified as June bearing, ever-bearing or day neutral.
- They should receive full sun at least eight hours every day.
- They are adapted to nearly all areas of Colorado, even high elevations.
- Strawberry beds generally are kept for three years.

Strawberries require at least eight hours of full sun each day of the growing season to produce at their maximum capability. Plant them in an area that does not interfere with the annual spading of the garden. Be careful when planting strawberries where sod used to be. Grubs, which have been feeding undetected on the sod roots, will divert their attention to the strawberry roots. Because there are fewer strawberry roots, a sizable grub population may cause severe damage. Wait one year for the grub population to disappear, and strawberries may safely be planted.

The gardener generally has no choice as to soil type; however, a sandy loam soil with a southern exposure is ideal. Strawberries like a loose, moderately fertile soil. Before planting, amend your soil with compost at a ratio of 1 part compost to 2 parts original soil, and make sure to add super phosphate or bone meal to encourage root growth. Varieties Strawberry varieties are classified as June bearing, ever-bearing or day neutral. Recommended June bearers (one crop) for this area are *Guardian*, *Kent Honeoye*, *Rechief*, *Delite* and *Bloomiden*.

Ever-bearing strawberries typically bear two main crops each year, with small amounts of fruit produced between the main crop in June and a lighter crop in late summer or early fall. For Colorado, ever-bearing strawberries are recommended for the home gardener because they tend to be more hardy. If a late spring frost kills the first flowers, you will still get a crop in late summer or fall. Some of the more common ever-bearing varieties are *Quinault*, *Ogallala*, *Fort Laramie* and *Ozark Beauty*. Quinault and Fort Laramie are recommended for Colorado because they are more hardy.

Day neutral varieties are similar to ever-bearers, but flower and fruit more consistently over the summer. Recommended day neutral varieties include *Tribute*, *Tri-Star* and *Fern*.

Planting There are two systems used for strawberry culture: the matted row, used with June-bearing strawberries, and the hill system, used with ever-bearing or day neutral varieties. In the matted row system, space the plants 2 feet apart in rows 4 feet apart. These plants are allowed to produce runners to fill in the row. Leave a pathway 1 1/2 feet wide between rows. Remove or relocate runners that root in this pathway or within 5 inches of an established runner.

With the hill system, space plants 1 foot apart in three rows that also are 1 foot apart, with 3 feet between each set of three rows. Remove all runners as they develop.

Unpack your strawberry plants and plant right away or heel them in a trench as a temporary location until they can be set out in the garden. Transplant in the cool afternoon to reduce wilting. Discard plants with dark roots or ones that look unhealthy. Remove flower buds, runners and damaged leaves before planting. The usual planting method is to fan out the roots of the plant, and place it in the hole so that the crown is at soil level. Press the soil

firmly around the roots to eliminate air pockets. Water each plant well after planting.

Mulching Mulch is essential for healthy strawberries. Use organic mulch such as straw or bark. Distribute mulch around your strawberry plants to a depth of 1 to 2 inches. This insulating layer helps keep fruit off of the ground, stops your bed from losing moisture, keeps the soil at an even temperature, and prevents weeds. Mulching is also essential to protect strawberries over the winter. Wait until the cold weather has inhibited growth, and the soil is cold—about December 1st, and add new straw around and on top of the plants. Hold the fresh mulch in place with weighted boards or piles of soil.



Leave the mulch on as long as possible to restrain plant growth in the spring. Early spring growth produces early flowers subject to damage by adverse weather. Therefore, check the plants under the mulch in March for new growth. When growth begins, part the mulch to allow sunlight to reach the foliage. As the plants continue to grow, gradually uncover the new leaves, leaving as much as possible around the plants. Rake the mulch back over the strawberries to protect them in case of a late spring frost.

Cultivation Remove the first blossoms that form on your new plants at least once on the hill system and twice on the matted row system. This diverts the resources of the plants into producing stronger root systems, and in the case of the matted row system, more runners. Stronger plants bear more fruit than those allowed to fruit early.

Strawberries should be fertilized twice a year with a high nitrogen fertilizer—once in the beginning of July and again in September.

Keep the soil damp until the first fall frost, then withhold water to help harden off the plants for winter. A final November watering helps prevent winter kill from drying out.

Generally, strawberry beds produce well for only three years. Remove it as soon as it ceases to bear in the fall of the third season, or leave it until spring. If the matted row system is used and the plants are still insect and disease free, plant a new bed in late August by carefully removing good, healthy, rooted runners and using them for planting the new bed. If the hill system is used where no runners are permitted, or if the plants are not healthy, order new plants in time for planting a bed in the spring, preferably in a different location.

Harvesting Pick strawberries every other day during the peak of the season. It is poor practice to let fruit rot on the vine, so pick even the rotted fruit. If berries are eaten or preserved immediately, harvest only red-ripe fruit and leave the caps on the plant. If the fruit will not be used for a few days, harvest the berries, caps and all, while still pink.

Insects and Disease Strawberries are remarkably free from most insects and diseases in Colorado. Occasionally, an insect problem arises, such as crown borers, leafhoppers, aphids, earwigs, slugs or tarnished plant bugs. Malathion is a good standard home insecticide to control aphids, leafhoppers and quite a few other sucking and chewing insects. Use Sevin to control earwigs and beetles. Control crown borers with a soil-applied insecticide. Control slugs with commercially prepared baits available at most garden centers. Do not spray plants when in flower -- pollinating insects may be harmed.

Disease problems occur less frequently than insect problems. Usually, the disease is controlled by removing the diseased plant or plant part. However, if it is widespread, other measures must be taken. In the case of systemic diseases, such as yellows (virus) or red stele (vascular), nothing can be done except to remove diseased plants. However, if a fungus develops on the foliage, spray the plants with a fungicide, such as Bordeaux Mix.. Bacterial diseases on strawberries are not important in Colorado.