

Strawberry Growing Guide

How to grow the tastiest, organic strawberries.



Growing Guide

- **Soil preparation:** Prepare a weed-free site that gets 8 to 10 hours of strong sunlight a day. Well-drained soil with a pH around 6.0 to 6.2 is ideal. To avoid verticillium wilt, don't plant in sites where raspberries, strawberries, or solanaceous plants (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, etc.) have grown before.
- **Planting:** Early spring planting is customary in most areas. For warm winter regions (California, Florida, and the southeast), fall planting is recommended.
- **Spacing:** Space June bearers on raised beds with 18 to 24 inches between plants, in rows 3 to 4 feet apart. Hills 10 to 18 inches apart, planted with single plants, are best for everbearers, day

neutrals, and June bearers in hot, humid climates.

- **Watering:** Provide 1 inch per week at the root zone.
- **Fertilizing:** Renovate rows after harvest by reducing their width to 12 inches and covering plants with 2 inches of compost. Apply a soluble organic fertilizer, such as a seaweed-fish blend, after renovation. Early spring fertilizer makes berries soft.
- **Special hint:** Alpine strawberries (*F. vesca*) are one of the parent species of the garden strawberry. They produce small, aromatic berries from early summer through frost. Alpines are grown from seed or divisions and produce no runners. They are care-free and make good ornamentals.

Pest Watch

Tarnished plant bug is the main fruit-feeding nemesis of strawberries. Strawberry sap beetle can infest overripe fruit. Plant decline can also be caused by root-feeding white grubs (beetle larvae) and nematodes. Viruses, which can be spread by aphids, often affect plants that are weakened by unfavorable growing conditions.

Disease Alert

Gray mold (botrytis) is disease enemy number 1 on strawberry fruit around the country. Anthracnose can devastate plantings in hot, humid areas. Leather rot, which causes an insipid berry taste you won't forget, is a sporadic problem on susceptible varieties when fruit comes in contact with damp soil. Red stele, a soilborne fungus, can be avoided by choosing resistant varieties.

Harvesting

Ripe berries appear about 30 days after bloom. Once the berry is fully red, let your taste buds be your final guide on when to harvest. Pick every two to three days, or daily in very hot weather. Keep green caps attached. To preserve flavor and shelf life, pick into a shallow, paper towel lined container, no more than three or four layers of berries deep. Refrigerate immediately after picking. Hull and wash just before serving.