STRAWBERRIES

STRAWBERRIES

In The Home Garden

Horticultural Branch,
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture

Strawberries can be grown successfully in gardens in almost any part of British Columbia. In the milder areas, no winter protection is required whereas in the colder areas where the snow cover is inadequate, mulching is required.

SOILS. Strawberries will grow in almost any good garden soil, but they prefer well drained sandy loams that are rich in organic matter. A slightly acidic soil is ideal (pH = 6.0 to 6.5). Where possible, avoid heavy silt and clay soils as they are difficult to manage and are often poorly drained.

SITES. South and western exposures will produce earlier fruit but they are often prone to late winter frost injury. Exposure to cold winter winds can be a serious problem, especially in areas of low snowfall, while low lying areas can be susceptible to late spring frosts at blossom time. Therefore, exposed areas, frost pockets and other unfavourable locations should be avoided wherever possible.

To reduce the amount of hoeing and hand weeding, it is strongly recommended that only soils free of grasses and other perennial weeds be selected for planting sites.

PLANTING SYSTEMS. There are two basic methods of growing strawberries in a garden - the Hill system and the Matted Row system. Today, almost all of the plants are grown in matted rows as it is much more productive and considerably easier to manage.

MATTED ROW SYSTEM. The newly planted plants are allowed to produce runners so that by the end of the first growing season, the rows are solid mats of plants. Set out the plants 24 to 30" (60 to 75 cm.) apart within the row and 42 to 48" (100 to 125 cm.) between the rows.

HILL SYSTEM. The runners are not allowed to establish so that only the original plants are maintained. Set the plants out at 18 to 24" (45 to 60 cm.) within the rows and 30 to 36" (75 to 90 cm.) between the rows.

PLANTS. Strawberry plants are susceptible to virus diseases and other problems so it is a poor practice to get a few plants from a neighbour. Always select healthy looking Certified virus-free planting stock. Dormant plants are ideal if they are available. If you are not ready to plant immediately, bundles of plants may be stored in a plastic bag in a refrigerator for several weeks.

PLANTING. A one year dormant strawberry plant should have roots about 5" (12 cm) long. Trim them to 4" (10 cm) and soak the roots in a bucket of transplant solution while you prepare the soil. It's best to plant bare root strawberries in a trench with a mound at the bottom which you can spread the roots out on. Then fill back in so the top of the crown is just above the soil surface. Firm the soil around the roots and then soak the soil so that the plants do not dry out.

Although strawberries can be planted throughout the growing season, spring planting is preferred over summer and fall planting.

When properly planted, the soil level is at the mid-point of the crown of the strawberry plant.

TYPES. There are three main types of strawberry plants. June-bearing, Everbearing and Day Neutral. June Bearing are the old fashioned once-a-year large crop. Everbearing give a crop in June and another crop in the late summer. Day Neutral strawberry plants will produce fruit almost constantly (once established) and are probably the best choice for your backyard berry patch.

Care of Young Planting

DE-BLOSSOMING. Many gardeners are eager to taste the first fruit from a new strawberry planting and so they allow the first flowers to develop. However, the removal of all blossom clusters for the first 8 to 10 weeks is the best cultural practice as it enables the plants to become properly established and thus produce better crops in subsequent years.

FERTILIZING. The kind and amount of fertilizer used will vary with different soils, climates, and management practices. Also, the use of manures, compost, etc. will influence fertilizer use. However, the following will serve as a general guideline:

Planting Year: (a) one week after planting, apply one to two ounces of 6-8-6 fertilizer per plant 3" to the side of the plants and 3" below the soil surface. (b) repeat in late July to help stimulate good runner production.

Cropping Year: (a) When new growth starts in the spring, apply one to two ounces of 6-8-6 fertilizer per plant, 4 to 6" to the side of the plant and 3" below the soil surface. (b) Repeat immediately after the crop is harvested to promote good crown and runner development.

Everbearing varieties should be treated in the same manner as "June bearing" varieties.

WEEDING. Strawberry plants respond to frequent shallow hoeing and cultivation. They are unable to compete successfully with weeds so it is important to keep them weed-free. In order to reduce the amount of hand weeding required, some people prefer to mulch the area between the strawberry rows with grass clippings, sawdust or straw, if it is available. Black plastic can also be used as a weed controlling mulch. If it is to be used, it is best applied over slightly ridged rows prior to planting and the plants set out through the plastic.

WINTER PROTECTION. In cold areas where the snow cover does not provide reliable protection throughout the winter and early spring, it is possible to cover the strawberry rows with straw, old hay, evergreen branches or other suitable material. This winter protection should not be applied until late in the fall when the soil is cool and the plants are quite dormant. It is important to remove the cover at the correct time in the spring - if it is removed too early, the plants could still be injured by a late frost while, if it is left on the plants too long, it promotes premature tender growth which is subject to injury when exposed.

Prepared by:
W. S. Peters, Horticulturist
B. C. Ministry of Agriculture