

Strawberries

There are more than 600 cultivars of strawberries that differ in flavour, size and texture but all of these heart-shaped delicious fruit are packed with phytonutrients that enhance your health.

THREE MAIN GROUPS OF STRAWBERRIES

- Alpine strawberries are a great choice for shady gardens. They need no special care can be left to fend for themselves after planting. They have very small but flavour packed fruit.
- Large fruited June-bearing strawberries flower in the short days of late spring and then develop their fruit in early summer. They can sometimes have a small crop in the autumn as well.
- Large fruited everbearing strawberries flower in the summer and form berries for a longer period through late summer into autumn. Expect to be eating fruit from these strawberries in regular flushes from July until the first autumn frosts.

PLANTING

Strawberry plants are inexpensive and easy to plant. A bed of strawberries usually lasts up to four years if planted in well-drained, fertile soil free from troublesome weeds. If drainage is poor then raised beds or containers are a great option.

- Mid-spring is the best time to plant.
- It's hard to do but, removing flowers from spring-planted strawberries in the first season will help encourage strong root establishment.
- Make sure the crowns of the plant (the point where the roots become shoots) should be at soil level, and individual plants space 40cm apart.
- To conserve water and heat while suppressing weeds, many gardeners grow strawberries through polythene (ideally white, with black on the underside). Or if you are averse to plastic then consider a straw mulch, it is how they got their name.

AFTER HARVEST

- After the final harvest of the summer, tuck any spare runners (young plants that develop as offshoots from the parent) into the row to fill in gaps or replace old plants. Remove any unwanted runners to prevent too much spread.
- Some gardeners prefer a continuous row in the second and third year rather than spaced plants. The total yield may be higher, but the quality of the fruits might suffer slightly. Whatever method you choose, try to keep the gap between the rows clear to get at the plants for weeding and harvest.
- Cut off the old foliage of summer bearers after cropping has finished, cutting to about 10cm (4") above the crown to allow the new leaves to come through.
- Reduce pests and diseases by clearing away the cut foliage and pulling back straw or other debris from around the plants.

GREAT CULTIVARS TO USE

Three excellent everbearing varieties to look for are Eversweet, Berries Galore and Temptation. All are great choices for container growing.

Quinalt, Fort Laramie, Tristar, Hecker and Albion are popular choices that are available in early spring as bare-root divisions ready for planting, as well as in pots later in the season.

Remember these plants need to be at their peak physical condition to produce their best fruit. So, treat your plant well and be sure to fertilize them every six weeks with a fruit and berry fertilizer such as GARDENWORKS 4-20-20 Fruit and Berry Food.

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