

# STRAWBERRIES

Commercially-grown strawberries are among the most pesticide-intensive fruits available so growing your own will reduce your intake of chemicals, though the superior taste of homegrown berries is the primary tipping point! Always wash strawberries thoroughly when you purchase them from grocery stores and pick-your-own operations.

## Site Selection:

Full sun is best, but a minimum of 6 hours of strong sunlight will be a suitable spot for your berries. If possible, plant your berries in a spot that has not grown a member of the nightshade family (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers) in the past couple of years. They prefer acidic soil that is well drained so a raised bed or a patch of clay soil that has been amended with compost works great.



## *Variety Selection:*

The primary choice to make when selecting strawberry plants is whether you want the berries to produce the bulk of their harvest over the course of a couple of weeks (for making jams and preserves) or if you want the harvest to be spread out over a longer period of time, which will be better suited for continual fresh eating, but not preservation. The strawberries with these two different types of growth habits are classified as June-bearers and ever-bearers, respectively. June-bearers are best suited to our climate, so if you are going to choose only one, we recommend going with a June-bearer.

➤ **June-bearers** produce fruit in April and May and are what the local pick-your-own farms grow in our region. These plants do not produce much during their first year if planted in the early spring, but crop more heavily if fall planted. Their yields will increase in the second year and years after. This high-density production time allows you to pick enough to freeze or make jam, and limits your bird-peck concerns to a shorter time frame.

- **Ever-bearers** are great for the backyard garden grazer, especially if you have a way to keep the birds away all season long! The plants grow less vigorously and the yields are lower in the spring than the June-bearers, but they will typically produce until autumn.

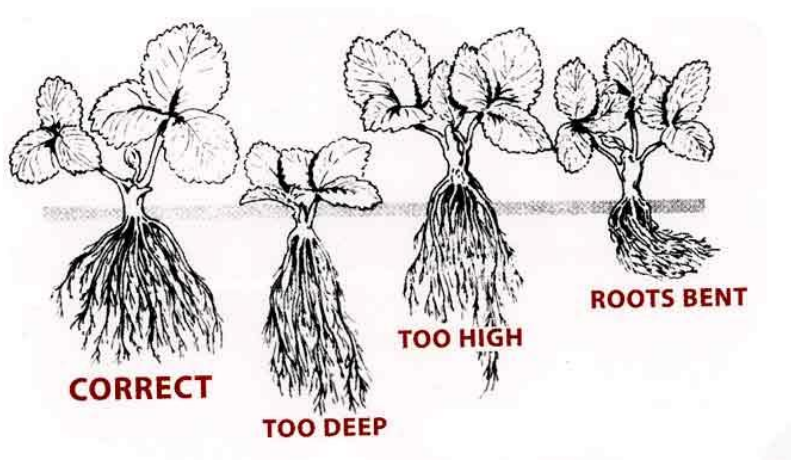
### *Planting Methods:*

There are two primary ways to grow your berries, with the second description being the most common backyard gardening method.

- In the double-row hill system, plants are grown in a double row, with the rows 12 inches apart and the plants 12 inches apart within the rows. The next double row should be about three feet over so it is easy to walk and harvest. Cut off all “daughter” plants that come off the mother so that all energy is focused on the “mother” hill. This is where your fruit will be. This hill should be replaced every year after destroying the current plants. This is the system that pick-your-own strawberry farms most often use.
- The matted row system is where you space your “mother” plants further apart and let some of the “daughter” plants develop so that you basically have a mass planting or “bed” of plants. Don’t let the bed get so big that you can’t easily harvest or cover with netting. Cull out and destroy about half of the biggest plants after harvest each year to keep the bed full of younger “teenage” plants for the next season. The matted row system usually gives you a few more years out of your planting. It is a good idea to destroy and replace all plants every five years or so to discourage diseases. Rotating to a new part of your garden is also a good idea.

### *Planting:*

Hydrate the bare rooted plants for a few minutes in a bucket of water and then plant them with the roots going straight down, never bent sideways. The crown where all the leaves come out should be flush with the ground, not too high and not buried. Water in the new plants and press the soil firmly around the roots. Plants are best planted in the winter to get a head start on root development. Expect only a few strawberries the first year, but ample after that!



### Care:

- *Pests:* By far your biggest concerns will be bird pecks and sneaky neighbors. Lightweight netting is cheap and easy to drape over your plants. Tell neighbors for each berry they take they need to pull three weeds. Occasionally you will have slugs eating them. Slugs are nocturnal so you won't likely see them – ask us how to handle them organically if they get out of hand.
- *Weeds:* Keep your bed weed-free, as strawberries do not like to compete for sunlight, moisture, or nutrients. Irrigating with a soaker hose or drip tape is a good idea since strawberries are shallow-rooted. If you choose to water by hand instead of with soaker hoses or drip irrigation, do your best to keep the foliage dry and prevent splashing of soil onto the foliage which can spread diseases.
- *Mulching* is important – hence the name *straw*berries. The row or bed you plant in should remain heavily mulched with straw, old leaves, pine needles, or some other organic matter year-round. This helps with weed control and moisture retention.