

THE STRAWBERRY

The name "**Strawberry**" comes from the Anglo-Saxons who called them strawberries because of the way the plants grow. The runners strew or spread along the ground. Although strawberries were gathered from the wild, the development of the strawberry as a **commodity** didn't occur until the 1820's in England.

The strawberry has an interesting history. Although they grew wild in many parts of the world, the large, beautiful, wonderful tasting strawberries of today (*Fragaria x ananassa*) are the result of **hybridization**. The commercial strawberry comes from the cross of two wild American strawberries: the Eastern Meadow Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) and the Beach Strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*).

The Eastern Meadow Strawberry was taken by early tradesmen from Virginia and planted in the gardens of Europe as a novelty. In 1700, a French botanist named Frezier transplanted the Beach Strawberry from its native home, in Chile, to France. When the Beach and Eastern Meadow strawberries were planted in the same garden, a natural cross pollination occurred. The result was a new superior breed of strawberries that bore large delicious fruits. With rare exceptions, every commercial strawberry on the market today arose from the hybrid cross of these two wild types.

TWO BASIC TYPES OF STRAWBERRIES:

Junebearers: These are the most productive and best for the home garden. These are usually recommended because they produce fruit before the dry part of the summer.

Everbearers: These produce two crops of strawberries; one crop in the summer and one in the fall. The fall crop is usually superior to its summer crop.

CLIMATE:

Strawberries are usually a cool-weather crop. More important to strawberries than climate is the "Photo-period" (the plants' response to light). The length and amount of daylight "tells" the plant when to blossom and when to produce runners. Because of the different regional conditions, varieties grown in Wisconsin are not suitable for growing in Florida (where strawberries are a winter crop).

JUNEBEARERS produce flowers under shorter days of spring and runners during the longer days of summer. Thus, Junebearers bloom in the spring and produce runners in the summer.

EVERBEARERS have the opposite growth habit. They produce flowers during long days of the summer and runners during short days 'of spring.

Interestingly, when strawberries are grown on the equator they all act like everbearers except that they do not produce any runners.

SITE:

Strawberries are not particular about the soil they grow in. They grow on a wide range of soil types, but soil that has some sand in it is best. The sand in the soil helps maintain good water drainage. Strawberries will not tolerate "wet feet." If planted in an area where standing water appears on the soil surface well into the spring, there are likely to be problems with collar rot diseases.

Strawberries require full sunlight to do their best. They will grow in shade, but if the shade is too heavy they will produce very little or not bear any fruit at all.

PLANTING:

Spring planting is best for strawberries in Wisconsin and most parts of the country. (In the south, where strawberries are grown as a winter crop they should be planted in the fall.)

When your strawberries arrive, they will be in bundles. Moisten their roots just before planting; this will help activate the roots when they are placed into the ground.

To plant the strawberries, you will need a long-handled shovel and a hoe. The preferred training method used by commercial and home growers alike is the matted-row *method*. Plants are set out in rows. These rows are about 2 feet wide with a 4-foot pathway space between rows. The plants are placed from 6 to 10 inches apart.

TRAINING YOUR STRAWBERRY PLANTS:

It is important to train runners so that they stay within the confines of the row, and not grow into the pathways. Occasional tilling of the pathways will help keep them free of runners and daughter plants. If ignored, the rows will fill in and become one giant unmanageable mess.

Mulch pathways to keep down weed growth and to help keep moisture in the soil. A mulch of chopped hay or straw works nicely. It also keeps the dust down and the berries stay cleaner when there is a mulch. If berries are in indirect contact with the soil, they can rot.

To control weeds, careful hand hoeing and shallow cultivation will get rid of most weeds. About 70% of a strawberry plant's roots are located within the top 3 inches of the soil and 90% of the roots are within the top 6 inches.

FERTILIZER

Strawberry plants benefit from fertilizer. Most Wisconsin soils have enough phosphorus and potassium so only nitrogen is needed. You can use houseplant fertilizer or garden fertilizer. Apply about ½ teaspoon of fertilizer per plant soon after planting, and midsummer. The following year don't apply fertilizer until after harvest.

