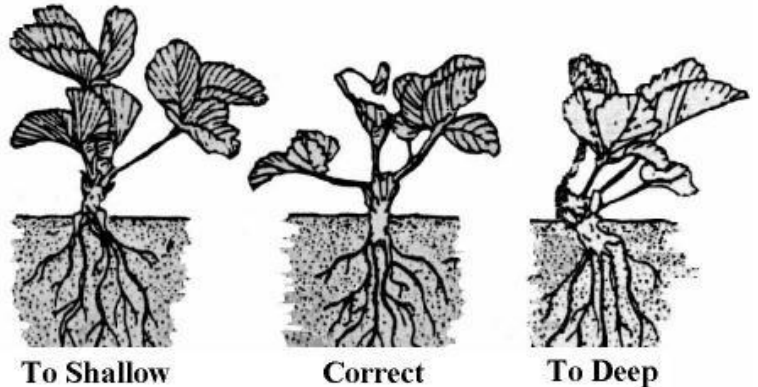




Strawberries

Fresh, tasty strawberries are a simple fruit for most home gardeners to try their hand at growing. Even children can learn about growing plants with a small strawberry patch in a corner of the yard.

Select a site with full sun. Be sure to do an extra good job of getting rid of weeds in the area you plan to use. Weeds in a strawberry bed will cause many problems later. You will not be able to use chemicals once your strawberry patch is established so weed free soil is important. Improve soil by generously tilling in compost to a depth of 1 foot. Strawberries are heavy feeders and need good, well drained soil.



Strawberries are purchased as bare root plants in spring and as potted plants throughout the season. Plants should be spaced about 1 foot apart either in rows or on 1 foot centers in a grid pattern. Two dozen plants will create a bed that will supply a family of four with plenty of fresh strawberries. Plant the strawberries so that the crown, the part where the roots join the leaves, is just at soil level.

If you go too deep the plant is apt to rot, too shallow and the roots will be exposed to drying out. You can plant strawberries anytime after the soil has dried up enough to work and should get them in the ground before June 30th.

Mulch is very effective for strawberries. It helps to keep roots cool, hold in moisture and keep fruit clean. Clean straw is the best choice but if you have grass clippings that are free of both weeds and chemicals you can use that too. In fall remove about half the mulch and till the rest in with fresh compost to fertilize your soil.

During the growing season strawberries require good supplemental water. It is often advised to not use overhead sprinklers because it can cause disease. Soaker hose or a drip system is best. With good soil your strawberry patch will need enough water to prevent the soil from ever drying out meaning that in the hottest part of summer they might need watering every day. If the plants are not fruiting, you can cut back on watering but keep the plants well hydrated so they go into winter healthy.

In fall you should cut the plants back and mulch them with evergreen boughs for protection. Be careful you do not cut into the crowns when you are cutting them back. You can cut off runners as they appear or do it with your fall cleanup, choosing strong ones to remain and rejuvenate the patch. Uncover your patch as soon as possible in spring.

Strawberries are classified under three basic types, June bearers, ever bearers and day neutrals. The differences relate to how the plants produce fruit.

June bearers, the classic type, produce one main crop, typically in June. They produce the largest berries and are best for the home gardener who wants to process all the fruit at once for preserves or freezing. June bearers, however, are typically the shortest lived plants and produce the most runners which gardeners must manage and use to keep a bed going for more than just a few years. June bearers also produce the fruiting buds during the cool and short days the previous fall and so mulching is critical for winter protection.

Everbearers have a very misleading name. Developed to produce fruit over a longer period, they actually produce a significant early crop and then a smaller late crop. The berries tend to be medium size and are considered very good for freezing. Everbearers produce their fruiting buds during the longer days of summer and thus need a site with strong sun for at least 6 hours a day.

The final type, **day neutral** strawberries were developed to produce fruit buds regardless of day length thus stretching the season for fresh berries. Home gardeners not interested in processing one large harvest prefer these for fresh eating. The quality of the fruit is very good.

For 2011 Swan River Gardens will be offering the following varieties:

June bearers:

Early Glow: Used often in commercial 'Pick Your Own' operations because it is a vigorous grower that produces a heavy crop. Large fruit, dark red. Good for processing and fresh eating. It also has good disease resistance and produces many runners allowing you to keep your patch going for many years.

Everbearing Varieties:

Fort Laramie: Very winter hardy and a vigorous grower with many runners. Produces a heavy crop of bright scarlet fruit with dark pink to scarlet interiors. Firm flesh, good sweetness. Good for processing and fresh eating.

Tribute: The best choice for disease resistance with good resistance to powdery mildew, leaf blight and leaf scorch. The plant is vigorous with a good summer crop followed by a good fall crop. Good for fresh eating and processing, flavor is slightly acidic but good. Bright red skin with lighter flesh.

Day Neutral:

Hecker: Heavy producer with medium size fruit. Good cold hardiness. The fruit is bright red with sweet flavor. Relatively new variety but we think it should be good for Montana. Very good for processing and fresh eating.

Aromas: Exceptional fruit quality, with very good flavor. Aromas have a larger fruit than most other strawberries, and substantially lower cull rate. Fruit is dark red, good for both fresh eating and processing uses. Helped by their size Aromas are the highest-yielding cultivar among the day-neutral cultivars.

Seascape: Yield large, juicy, well-shaped berries with superb flavor, and they bear fruit over a long season. It's one of the most productive varieties yet! Shallow roots make them ideal for growing in containers as well as in the garden.

Be sure to ask the experts at Swan River Gardens if you have any questions about your strawberry patch. We are happy to help.