



# Strawberries in Your Garden

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Strawberries are a delicious and easy crop to grow in the home garden. Once established, strawberry plants can give the home gardener an abundance of fruit for several years.

## TYPES & VARIETIES

An exploration of nurseries and garden centers in Stanislaus County found two main varieties available.

*Quinault* is an ever-bearing type of strawberry that is large, flavorful and soft. It produces a total of two crops: one in June and another in the fall.

*Sequoia* is considered an extremely tasty strawberry variety. *Sequoia* is a Junebearer, which means it produces its crop from June through July.

Strawberry plants are available at nurseries and garden centers as bare-root plants in late winter. Bare-root plants are dormant, but once planted begin to grow as the temperature warms.

When winter is over, nurseries may have strawberry plants available in 6-packs or 4-inch containers.

## STRAWBERRY CARE

Strawberries need at least 6-8 hours of sun daily. The preferred type of soil for optimum growth is a well-drained loam. However,

strawberries can flourish in most soil if it has been amended properly.

Before planting, work compost into the ground until blended. If your soil is high in clay, it means that a wet handful can be squeezed and stay in that shape. Clay soil has small particles that pack together and prevent the drainage of water. Mixing in compost adds larger particles that create more air space for better drainage.

## PLANTING LAYOUTS

### The Matted Row

If you have limited garden space, the matted row is an excellent layout choice. Create rows spaced 4 feet apart. Then place plants along the row, leaving 18" in between. Once plants are established, allow runners to fill areas in between.

The matted row is a very productive way to grow strawberries, but if rows get too crowded, fruit will stay small and disease may occur. Remove dead leaves and berries weekly, and prune a few leaves off each plant to make the area less dense. The matted row planting layout is recommended for Junebearers like *Sequoia*.

### The Hill System

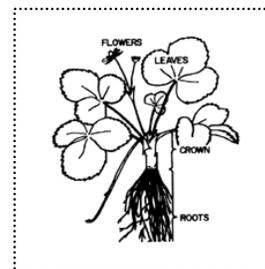
Create rows that are 2-3 feet apart. Then place plants one foot apart along the rows. Pinch off all runners that are



produced. This layout is recommended for both *Sequoia* and *Quinault* varieties.

## PLANTING METHOD

When planting, dig holes that are twice as wide and long as the plant. Add soil back into the hole. The fleshy portion of the plant between the top growth and the roots is known as the 'crown.' Ensure roots are not above the soil line and the crown isn't buried underground. After planting, firm the soil and water deeply.



## STRAWBERRY POTS

For gardens with small spaces, try using a strawberry pot. These pots have outside openings that allow several plants to grow at once. Strawberry pots have excellent drainage and also allow the fruit to hang,

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eliminating attacks from most pests and diseases.

## **WATERING**

The best way to water strawberries is to use drip or soaker hose placed at least two inches away from the plant. Strawberry roots are shallow, so keep the soil moist but not soggy. If soil is high in clay, be especially careful not to over-water.

Strawberry plants need regular water to thrive, especially during fruit bearing season. However, sprinkler irrigation during fruiting season can leave fruit susceptible to rot if plants do not dry out in between watering.

When using strawberry pots, check the openings regularly to ensure soil doesn't get too dry.

## **RUNNERS & BLOSSOMS**

Strawberry plants reproduce themselves by means of "runners" that shoot off from the mother plant and root nearby.

These runners can take vigor away from the mother plant. For *Quinault*, pinch off runners until July during the first year to ensure all energy goes into making the plant. After July, allow runners to fill in the matted row. Also in the first year, pinch off blossoms until July. During the first fall season, *Quinault* will yield a

crop. After the first year, it is no longer necessary to pinch off blossoms or runners.

For *Sequoia*, pinch off all blossoms and most runners during the first year. Allow them to fill in. *Sequoia* will yield it's first crop the following year.

It's important for strawberry plants to be well-established before they are allowed to produce fruit. Leave a few runners to fill in the rows if pests have reduced the number of plants.

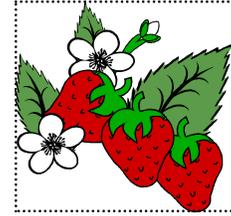
## **FERTILIZER**

Strawberries aren't heavy feeders, but can benefit from an application of fertilizer. Use ammonium phosphate or ammonium sulfate, or a "Berry" fertilizer found in most nurseries and garden centers. Follow directions on the package.

If soil has sufficient compost, it may not be necessary to add fertilizer.

## **PESTS**

Many insects are attracted to strawberries, including snails, slugs, earwigs, aphids, mites and root weevils. One way to kill garden snails and slugs is to re-use a yogurt or cottage cheese container and bury it at soil level. Fill the container with beer, (the yeast attracts



these pests). The snails and slugs will fall into the trap and drown. However, a family dog will also be attracted to this beverage and may drink it before the snails and slugs do.

Baits containing iron phosphate are also available. This bait acts as both pesticide and fertilizer, and is safe to use near plants. Always check labels to see if the product you choose is safe to use near pets.

To capture earwigs, roll sheets of newspapers and set them near the plants. Earwigs will hide in these shelters, so dispose of the paper every morning before they emerge.

To discourage aphids, spray them with a soft stream of water or use an insecticidal soap.

Animals attracted to strawberries in the garden include birds as well as pet dogs. Use row cover or chicken wire during berry season to prevent unwelcome visitors from feeding.

There are numerous ways to deal with pests in a strawberry patch. Check the UCIPM Pest Notes link below for more

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information, or visit the Cooperative Extension Office in Modesto.

## **DISEASES**

Strawberries are susceptible to several diseases including mildews and fungi that affect the fruit, diseases that cause dead spots on leaves, as well as crown rot and root diseases. Keep strawberry plants healthy by removing dead leaves and ripe or rotten fruit.

If your garden is known to have a wilt disease, avoid planting strawberries in areas with previous plantings (last three years) of plants in the Solanaceae or Cucurbit family. Plants in these families are susceptible to wilt diseases. Plants in the Solanaceae family include tomato, potato, eggplant and pepper. Cucurbits include melons and squash.

If your garden has a wilt disease, a good crop to plant in that area is corn. Otherwise leave the area fallow (don't plant anything) for several years to reduce disease levels in the soil.

Replace strawberry plants every 3-4 years, and also rotate them to a new area. This will ensure a fresh start. Buy plants from a nursery or start new ones from runners into clean soil.

For more information, visit the

UCIPM website listed at the bottom of this page.

## **HARVESTING**

Pick fruit when the berry is fully ripe or at least three-fourths of the berry is pinkish red. Leave the stem on the berry to prolong shelf-life. Strawberry plants can yield up to 2 cups of berries per plant during the growing season.

## **BERRY BENEFITS**

Strawberries contain vitamin C, folate, potassium, iron, protein and calcium. One cup of strawberries also provides a serving of fruit containing 3 grams of fiber, something often missing in the American diet.

## **KID TIPS**

Obesity is a significant problem in the United States. Today, one in three children between the ages of 9-11 is overweight or at risk of being overweight. Getting children involved in gardening helps them



understand where food comes from and enables them to make healthier eating choices. Gardening is also great exercise.

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Strawberry illustration taken from The Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet: Strawberries are an excellent fruit for the home garden at: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1424.html>

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