

I hear a lot of opinions about how to properly plant strawberries. Can you fill me in a bit?

Not a problem in the least. As many growers know, I am a major advocate of proper planting technique in strawberries, quite plainly because this leads to good plant establishment and consequently fewer problems later on in the season.

It is extremely important that the roots of the strawberry transplant be pointed down in the soil and planting hole, since if they are not (called "J-rooting") with some or all of the roots pointing upward or even having the root tips exposed above the surface of the soil, the plant, while perhaps not showing obvious signs of detriment, very likely will underperform.

Work done in the late 1990's in Santa Maria by the late Farm Advisor Warren Bendixen compared fields predominantly planted in a "J-rooted" fashion to those which were not. This work was done in response to a shift going at that time from 40" inch beds with 5- 6" deep planting slots with very little J rooting to the 64" beds so common in Santa Maria today, but with planting slots which would result in a lot of J-rooted plants. The result was as expected: the fields with plants predominantly planted with the roots pointing up, or J-rooted, ended up yielding close to 20% less than those which were not.

Another very important aspect of planting is to make sure the transplant is not planted too deep or too shallow. Ideally, the soil line should be right level with the middle of the crown of the transplant. If the transplant is too deep, the plant will struggle to push leaves up to the surface, delaying development and possibly risking problems with disease. If the transplant is too shallow with the crown fully exposed above the surface of the soil, it runs a great risk of drying out before it has a chance to establish roots deeper down.

Finally, strawberry growers should be sure to water very soon after transplanting. Putting on abundant water after transplant not only supplies sufficient water to a soil and plant which may have been on the dry side, but this water also helps in closing the pore spaces of the soil. This watering has traditionally been done with overhead irrigation, but some work by my colleague Oleg Daugovish in Oxnard has shown that this can also be done with the drip irrigation system.

The above has been a discussion of how to properly transplant a strawberry. For more on this subject, and others concerning strawberries and caneberries, please contact Mark Bolda at UC Cooperative Extension Santa Cruz County at 831-763-8025 or mpbolda@ucanr.edu.