

## Strawberries for the Garden

Strawberries are the easiest of the fruit crops to raise in Delaware. They can be part of your landscape, grown in pots, or planted in the garden.

### Establishing a bed:

Select a well-drained soil that is free of perennial weeds and has not had strawberries in it for at least 3 years. They are best planted in soils have been tilled for a few years to avoid soil insect problems like grubs and cutworms which would be come in lawn areas.

March to early April is the normal planting season. Plant as soon as the soil is dry enough to work. Add lime to bring the pH up to 6.0 to 6.5. Apply 3 pounds (1-1/2 quarts) of a 5-10-10 or 5-10-15 per 100 square feet a week before planting without a soil. If you have a soil test, follow the recommendations.

Use a trowel or shovel to plant the plants. Make the hole big enough to spread out the roots. The crown of the plant should be even with the top of the ground. Press soil firmly around the plants to eliminate air pockets. Water soon after planting and water regularly until the plants are established. The plants can be set in rows 4 feet across by 18 inches or 3' by 24". Remove the flowers buds to developed better plants.

As runner plants develop, space them out to be 4 to 6 inches apart. Cut off all runners produced in September and October since they are not productive. Keep the bed weed free. Water in August, if it is dry, improves the setting of flower buds which will produce berries in the spring. In mid August apply .1 lb of nitrogen per 100 sq ft. which would be 1 pt of 10-10-10, or .3 lbs of ammonia nitrate. The plants need nitrogen to set buds.

**Mulching** – Mulch to reduce winter weeds like chickweed and to protect the plants from winter damage; mulch the plants in November after the plants are dormant.

Remove the mulch in the spring when plants begin new growth. Straw, pine chats, slat hay of similar materials can be used. Mulching for winter protection is not necessary in Kent and Sussex Counties.

**Spring Care** – In February, apply 1 lb (about 1 pint) of 5-10-10 fertilizer per 50 square feet of row directly over the plants. This application is not necessary if fertilizer was applied in August. This late application of fertilizer can make the berries soft and they will not keep as

well. Remove the mulch from plants gradually. Some mulch can be left in the row to keep the berries clean and cover the weeds. If you have problems with slugs remove all the mulch to reduce slug problems

**Varieties** – Earliglow, Sparkle, Guardian, Red Chief, Late Glow, Allstar and Delite are varieties with good fruit quality. If ever-bearing plants are desired, plant Tribute or Tristar.

**Insect and Disease Control** – The most serious diseases are soil born fungi which can only be controlled by planting resistant varieties. In wet seasons, gray mold (a fruit rot) can cause major losses. The fungus attacks begin during blooming. To control gray mold, apply the proper fungicide at full bloom, 10 days later and 20 days later. This will help reduce fruit loss.

Sap beetles attack ripe fruit. The best control is to keep the strawberries picked as they ripen. See. “Strawberry Spray Schedule For Pests in Home Gardens”, HG-23. Most gardeners and successfully produce all the fruit they want without pesticides by avoid too much fertilizer and timing pickings and removal of bad fruit.

**Renovation** – Strawberries can be re-fruited by renovating the patch soon after harvest. However, not all patches should be saved. If they are weedy, have diseases, or the berries are small, the bed should be replaced. A good patch may be re-fruited 3 or 4 times.

Mow off the tops of the plants. Set the mower high enough to clear the crowns. After the leaves have dried, rake them off the bed. Narrow the bed to 10 inches. The best way is to save one side of the bed, thus saving all the young plants. Thin out the remaining plants so they are six inches apart in the row. Saving too many plants will result in small fruit. Apply about 20 ounces of ammonium nitrate or 2-1/2 pints of 10-10-10 per 100 feet of row. Then apply an inch of water to start the plants growing. Hoe or hand weed to keep out weeds. In mid-August apply 1 pint of 10-10-10 per 100 feet of row.

Supply an inch to two of water a week until mid-September, either through rainfall or irrigation. Heavier soils need less water than sandy soils. Remove the runners that form in September and October. Then follow the spring care program.