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Growing Strawberries

Soil – Strawberries do well in any good garden soil in a sunny location. If possible try to pick a place that drains well and is reasonable free from weed seed. Also, it is a good idea to change the location of any newly planted strawberries every several years, as it lessens the chance of disease build-up. Prepare the soil by adding compost, well-rotted manure and/or peat moss. Try to work the ground to a depth of about 6”.

Planting – It is best to start planting as soon as possible after the winter freeze, and when the soil can be worked (weather permitting). This is usually in late March or early April. Early planting has the advantage of getting the plants well established before hot weather and before weeds begin. If possible plant strawberries as soon as purchased; if not keep them in your refrigerator, wrapped in a plastic bag. When you are ready to plant trim excess roots, about 1” and then soak the roots in water for 30 minutes. Next, lay out your strawberry bed keeping in mind to plant in rows 3½ feet apart, and space plants 18-24” apart. Dig holes, it is important to set the plants in the ground deep enough so their roots are entirely covered with soil. Be careful not to cover the crowns, as that would prevent the plants from properly growing. Press soil firmly around each plant. If rainfall is not adequate, water the plants frequently during the first six weeks.

Care of Plants – In about 6 to 7 weeks after planting blooms will appear. In the first year only, remove blooms by snapping them off by the stem. This will allow the plants to grow much faster and produce more runners, which will become new plants for next spring. The second and following years after harvest, cultivate or till old plants, keeping runners for next years production. If leaf spot develops, treat with fruit tree spray or start over with new disease free plants. Proper management results in new plants and ongoing production for several years.

Mulching – Make sure to keep patch weeded, but never work the ground too deeply in a dry time, as this will cause the moisture to evaporate more quickly. Mulching will help to keep weeds down and hold in moisture. Rye, straw, hay or untreated grass clippings may be used.

Mulching also gives winter protection, in late fall cover the beds about 4” deep. In the very early spring when the plants show their first signs of growth, remove the mulch, leaving just enough to cover between the rows.

Fertilizer – If soil has been prepared as above no fertilizer is initially needed. If you wish to use a commercial fertilizer, wait until your plants have become well established (usually 5 to 6 weeks after planting) and then give them a light side dressing of 10-10-10. Never apply fertilizer when the plants are wet, as this may burn the leaves. Fall fertilization (in late August to mid-September) is most important, as this is the time that the fruit buds (which determine the spring crop) are developing. In following years, only lightly fertilize in very early March, as too much may cause excessive plant growth and lower yields. Continue to fertilize in the fall of each year.