

# Growing Strawberries

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Strawberries are a perennial plant that can produce bountiful crops for four years if cared for properly. They are fairly easy to grow in almost all climates and soils.



## Selecting and Preparing a Site

Select a site that receives 6–10 hours of direct sunlight. While strawberries are tolerant of different soil types, they grow best in well-drained, sandy soils. They do not tolerate heavy clay soils very well. Work aged manure or compost into the soil a couple of months prior to planting. If working with a clay soil, mix in 4 inches or more of compost and rake the soil into raised mounds to improve drainage. For sandy soil, cultivate lightly to remove weeds and mix in a 1 inch layer or compost or manure. Soil pH should be between 5.5 and 7. If necessary, amend the soil in advance of planting. Raised beds are a good option for strawberry plants.



## Planting

There are two types of strawberries — June-bearing and day-neutral. June-bearing are the most common strawberry type. They do not produce a crop the first year but produce early summer crops for the next four years. Day-neutral plants produce the same year they are planted. They produce through the summer and fall for one or two years and their fruits tend to be smaller than June-bearing strawberries. Strawberry varieties are sensitive to local conditions so a variety that performs well in one area of Pennsylvania may not perform well in another area. Consult with the county extension office or a reputable nursery for recommended varieties or experiment with several varieties. June-bearers that tend to do well in Pennsylvania include Earliglow, Wendy, Cavendish, Allstar, and Jewel. Recommended day-neutral varieties include Seascape and Albion.

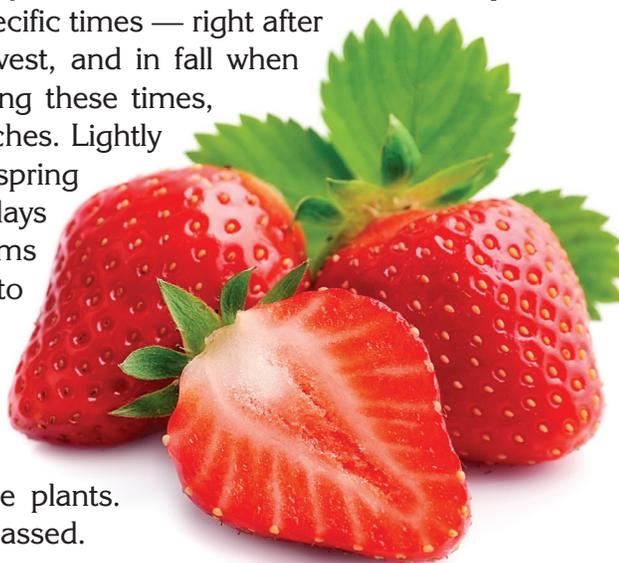
Keep plants in a shady area or refrigerator until planting. Place roots in water about 30 minutes prior to planting. Do not allow the roots to dry out prior to planting. Plant strawberries in late April or early May. Planting after June 1st is not recommended. Plant June-bearing strawberries 18 to 24 inches apart in rows at least 36 inches apart. Day-neutral strawberries should be planted about 5 to 9 inches apart and mulched immediately with about 4 inches of clean straw. The soil line should be above the roots but the crown should be at the soil surface. Water plants well at the time of planting.



## Caring for the Site

Keep strawberry beds mulched to reduce water needs and weeds. Weed diligently, especially in the first months after planting. Because they have shallow roots, moisture is important to strawberries, which require extra water at specific times — right after planting, during peak harvest, after peak harvest, and in fall when buds are forming for the following year. During these times, water the plants so that the soil is wet to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Lightly fertilize with all-purpose granules. Do not apply manure in the spring of a fruiting year. In warm weather, berries ripen about 30 days after blossoms are fertilized. In the first year, pick off the blossoms to discourage fruiting. This will allow the plant's food reserves to be used to develop healthy roots.

Strawberry plantings require mulching for protection from drops in temperatures. In December, apply approximately 4 inches of clean wheat, oat, or rye straw or salt marsh hay. Do not apply the mulch in clumps as this can smother the plants. Remove the mulch in the spring after the danger of frost has passed.





## Harvesting

Berries are ready to be harvested when they are colorful and can be easily pulled off the plant. Pick the berries after the plants have dried in the morning, retaining the caps. Keep the picked berries out of direct sunlight. Refrigerate the berries as soon as possible and do not wash them until just prior to use.



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