



# Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse Centre Success Sheet No. 108

## Strawberry

### Introduction

Strawberries are a low, perennial herb and are a popular and welcome addition to any home garden. They are relatively easy to grow, require a minimum of space and need virtually no chemicals. The berries can be enjoyed fresh, frozen or preserved. Low in calories, they are an excellent dessert fruit and a good source of vitamin C.

### History

The strawberry, *Fragaria*, is believed by natural historians to have been cultivated in ancient Greek and Roman gardens. English and French royalty developed a taste for the fruit in the 1300s. The berry was smaller then than today. The *Fragaria virginia*, from eastern North America, was introduced to Europe in the 1600s. This strawberry was to sire today's modern, big-fruited varieties.

### Soil Preparation

The strawberry will grow well in the same spot for at least two years. The plants have shallow roots, getting all their moisture and nourishment from the top few inches of soil. Strawberries require soil that is light but rich with manure, compost or peat, to hold the moisture.

Soil previously cultivated is ideal for eliminating problems of grass, weeds and white grubs. Grass and weeds compete with the strawberry's shallow roots for moisture and nutrients. White grubs live mostly in grass-covered soil and love strawberry roots.

### Planting

Wait one year before planting strawberries where grass has been growing. They are best

set with the root straight down and the crown even with the top of the ground. Planting approximately 6" apart in all directions is sufficient space. Irrigate enough to wet the soil 6-8" deep. Blossoms that emerge soon after planting must be pinched to encourage early runners.

### Irrigation and Care

Strawberries' shallow roots cannot stand severe drought. Irrigate well once a week during a dry spell and also just before and during harvest. Watering in late August, September and early October is also important; the buds are forming next season's crop. Proper irrigation can help prevent frost injury to blossoms in the spring although row covers are more effective.

Hand hoeing and weeding without using chemicals is best. Herbicides should not be applied when plants are blooming, runners are taking root and fruit buds are forming.

### Pests and Diseases

Several precautions can minimize insect and disease problems. Well-drained soil reduces the chance of red stele infection. A patch rotation every three or four years is helpful. During harvest, remove berries damaged by disease and insects, reducing fruit rot.

Renovating beds each year by removing older foliage encourages healthy, vigorous growth. Starting a new planting every other year to replace old plantings after their second or third crop is a preventative measure for problems. Do not allow insects and diseases to build up; this is very important to maintain a healthy, tasty crop.

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