

GROWING STRAWBERRIES

By

J. F. Rosborough
Extension Horticulturist
Texas A. & M. College

Strawberries are adapted to a wide range of soil and climatic conditions. They are the first fruit to ripen and less time is required from planting to harvest than any other fruit.

Preparing The Land

The land should be plowed in late summer and pulverized thoroughly. In areas of heavy rainfall, plow the soil into beds eight to ten inches in height and two to three feet in width. In areas of limited moisture, beds 12 to 16 inches wide should be prepared so that irrigation can be done when needed. The home gardener should apply 50 pounds or more of rotted manure per 100 feet of row before planting. Where commercial fertilizer can be used, about five pounds of a 4-12-4 or 4-10-7 mixture may be applied per 100 feet of row.

Varieties

Recommended varieties for East Texas are Klondyke and Blakemore. These varieties are large, attractive, and ship well. They are hardy to winter cold and summer heat. For South Texas and the Gulf Coastal Area, Missionary and Ranger are recommended. These varieties are early, of good quality, and may be used for home gardens or for commercial planting. For West Texas, the everbearing varieties, Gem and Mastodon, are recommended.

Planting

From October 15 to November 15 is the best time to set the plants. Plants should be spaced 10 to 12 inches apart in the row. *Do not set too deep.* If the buds in the center of the plant are covered with soil, the plants will fail, or delay blooming, or may even die. Try to set them at the same depth at which they grew originally. The setting can be done more rapidly by one person dropping plants ahead and a second person making the holes and setting the plants. Pack the soil tightly around each plant to keep roots from drying out. Water the plants at time of setting if needed.

Cultivation, Scraping And Strawing

A fall and winter growth of weeds among strawberry plants must be kept under control. *Shallow cultivation is essential.* Between January 15 and February 1, or prior to blooming, the soil around the plants should be hoed carefully to destroy all weeds. A layer of pine straw or hay two inches thick should be applied over the entire bed. Work the straw well around the plants. For an average family sized strawberry patch, two or three bales of hay will cover the beds on about 500 feet of row. For an acre of strawberries about ten wagon loads of loose pine straw or hay will be needed to cover the beds and middles.

In West Texas or in areas where the plants are irrigated, straw is not recommended. If the plants are to produce large sized berries, the soil must be kept moist from the time the first bloom appears. This will vary from one to three irrigations per week.

Harvesting

Be careful not to bruise the berries when harvesting. The picker should grasp the stem between the thumb and forefinger, pinching it off with the nails one-fourth inch from the fruit. *Pickers should not collect a handful at a time before placing in the berry boxes.*

Strawberries are picked usually when they have attained two-thirds red color. Berries less than two-thirds inch in diameter should not be harvested for shipment. At the height of the ripening season, the patch should be gone over at least every other day. As soon as each carrier is filled, take it to the shed and protect it from the sun. The crop is usually marketed in 24-quart ventilated strawberry crates. Average yield of strawberries in Texas is about 1400 quarts per acre.

Care of Plants After Harvest

Most Texas home gardeners will profit by plowing up strawberries at the end of harvest. In East and Southeast Texas there is adequate moisture throughout the summer to carry the plants over from one season to the next. In the High Plains Area, the summers are cool enough so that plants will not burn. In all other areas it is cheaper to buy 500 to 1000 plants and set them out each fall, rather than worry with irrigation and care throughout the hot summer.

The commercial producer in Southeast Texas should hoe out the patch when the last berries are harvested, plow around each row and apply 200-300 pounds of 5-10-5 fertilizer per acre. This will prepare for additional plant production during the late spring season. In October or early November, the whole row of strawberry plants should be barred off with a turning plow. Six hundred to 1000 pounds of commercial fertilizer per acre is applied in the furrow and the soil thrown back in place. It is advisable to thin the remaining plants to a spacing of 8 to 12 inches.

To increase a planting of berries in October or early November, daughter plants may be taken from the old rows when fertilizer is applied. About 3000 plants will increase to 16000 plants in one season. This is enough plants for setting one acre.

The Strawberry Barrel

Under Texas' conditions, the planting of strawberries in out of door locations is more desirable than improvised areas such as barrels and closed beds. The growing of strawberries in barrels does not result in high yields nor do plants grow normally. It has been noted that more satisfactory yields may be obtained from a small area of a few square feet in a flower bed or near the house where the strawberries can be planted in open ground.

Issued by
The Extension Service
Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and
The United States Department of Agriculture
Ide P. Trotter, Director, College Station, Texas