

Strawberries

The best loved of all summer fruits, their sweet red berries are irresistible to almost everyone. Very quick to produce their fruits, strawberry plants are an excellent crop for the amateur.

They are different from most fruits in that their seeds are produced on the outside of the fruit - this combined with their bright red colour has the unfortunate side-effect of making them very attractive to birds.

Summer fruiting strawberry plants crop over a very short period, not much more than three weeks. Perpetual strawberries however, produce three flushes of fruit, cropping throughout the entire summer.

The majority of shop-bought strawberries in the UK have been grown abroad and transported all the way from the Canary Islands to England - strawberries do not travel well. The taste of home-grown garden strawberries is undoubtedly a hundred times better than the commercial varieties. Have a go at growing your own strawberries with GardenAction know-how, hints and tips.

Where To Grow

Frost is the first thought when considering where to grow strawberry plants in your garden. They are very hardy plants during the winter but are not so hardy when they burst into life in spring. Strawberries produces flowers early in the Spring and because they are close to the ground, it is important to position strawberries where they have least risk of frost. The highest ground is always the best. Frost damage when they start into growth will occur if the temperature drops below -2°C (-4°C with cloche or poly-tunnel protection).

Strawberries are ideal fruit for benefiting from the use of cloches to produce earlier and better fruit. [Click here](#) if you want to buy cloches online from our approved suppliers. Alternatively, [click here](#) to go to our in depth article on how to select and use cloches with specific details on how and when to use cloches on strawberries to produce earlier and better fruit.

The next considerations are sun and wind - grow them in the sunniest position in the garden and in the least windy. Too much wind and insects will be unable to pollinate the plants. One tip, don't plant strawberries where peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and potatoes have been grown - these plants could pass on *verticillium wilt*, a serious strawberry disease. Neither should strawberries be grown on land which has recently had grass growing on it - there will undoubtedly be a large number of wireworms on such land who will enjoy eating your strawberries long before you get your chance!

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Folklore

Available Soon

Latin Name

Type

Perennial herbaceous plant with edible fruits

Site and Soil

Well-dug moisture retaining and free-draining soil with lots of organic matter. Full sun and protected from wind.

Plant to Harvest Time

Six to ten months

How Many?

Average 350 grams (10oz) per plant.

Size

Spread 23cm (9in);
height 20cm (8in)

Soil Preparation

Strawberries do not produce deep roots, but they very much appreciate their soil being well-dug to a spades depth. Prepare the soil at least one month before planting. Incorporate as much organic matter as possible and include two handfuls of bonemeal per square metre (yard). A few days before planting apply the recommended dose of general fertiliser such as Growmore. Strawberries are greedy feeders over a relatively short period of time.

When To Plant

Summer fruiting strawberries (the type seen in most shops) can be planted in late August/early September or early April. The best results undoubtedly come from planting in September, although if your area suffers heavy winter frosts, it is best to wait until April. Perpetual strawberries should be planted in April.

For both types, wait until the soil is crumbly and not water-logged.

Where [poly-tunnels](#) or [cloches](#) are used, strawberries can be raised about 3 weeks earlier than those without protection. [Click here](#) to buy a poly-tunnel or cloche now from GardenAction's preferred online supplier.

How To Plant Strawberries



It is important to plant strawberry plants to the correct depth - too low in the ground and the growing crown may rot, too high and the roots may dry out.

Use the diagram on the left as a guide and also see the real picture below it (click it to



enlarge it). The left hand plant in the diagram is too high and the roots may dry out. The right hand plant in the diagram is too low and the roots may rot, the middle plant is correct. The plants should be planted to the same depth as they have grown in their pots.

Care of Strawberries

Strawberries need lots of water until they are well established but don't water-log them. When they are established (around mid-May), they should be OK without additional water. But when the fruits start to swell, begin to water again.

Summer fruiting strawberries planted in spring and perpetual strawberries should have their first blooms pinched off to enable a good root system to be established. Strawberries planted in September (as recommended above) can be left to flower and fruit in their first summer.

Because strawberries produce their fruit so quickly, it is not necessary to feed them - this makes it all the more important that the soil is prepared as described above.

In May, the plant will produce runners which have 'nodes' along them - these nodes are the beginning of new strawberry plants. The runners should be removed because they will sap the strength from the plant resulting in less fruit.

Where the plants are being grown under cloches, remember to open them wide during the middle part of the day so that insects can reach the flowers and pollinate them.

Protecting the Fruit

As the fruit begins to develop, their weight will cause them to lay on the ground. Before this happens (but no earlier than necessary), cover the soil around the plants with either straw or black plastic. Where plastic is used, it can be kept in place with stones - small holes should be made in the plastic to allow drainage and stop water gathering on it. The plastic or straw will prevent the fruits from lying directly on the soil which will rot them.

If you have a bird population in your garden, the plants should be protected (when the fruits begin to swell) with light weight plastic netting. This should be held clear of the plants by tying it to short wooden posts and securing the netting to them.

Container Growing Strawberries

Strawberries can be grown in all sorts of containers and their needs are the same. We recommend the specially designed strawberry planters with rings of neat holes - there is no need for the fancy ones, a basic one will do the job well.

First, prepare a layer of drainage materials (hardcore, broken bricks etc.) covering the base of the container for an 2.5 cm (1in) high. Cover the drainage layer with potting compost to the level of the lowest ring of holes.

For all but the smaller containers, it is vital to provide a central drainage core as well. Either make a wire mesh tube 10cm (4in) in diameter, and 10cm (4in) shorter than the height of the container; place it into the middle of the container and fill with drainage material. Alternatively use a plastic tube of the same diameter and height, place it in the container, fill with drainage material and remove the plastic tube when it is surrounded by potting compost.

Place the plants through the lowest level of rings and add more compost up to the next level of rings - continue until reaching the top. It is a good idea to gently firm the compost down as you go along, and water the compost at each level of rings to ensure it is fully moist.

Recommended Varieties

Recommending varieties of strawberries is difficult because so much depends on personal taste. However you will not be disappointed if you choose one of the varieties listed below. [Click here](#) if you want to buy your strawberry runners online now.

CAMBRIDGE FAVOURITE (summer fruiting)

The best example of how an English summer strawberry should be. Lovely red medium sized fruits with lots of taste. This variety has been a gardener's favourite for generations.

MAE (summer fruiting)

Brand new in 2003 this variety produces very early fruits. Use [poly-tunnels or cloches](#) to protect the plants up to June ([click here](#) to buy poly-tunnels / cloches online now) and this variety will provide you with strawberries as early as mid May. The fruits are large, firm and tasty.

FLAMENCO (perpetual)

Large tasty red fruit produced over a long season starting in June. Very good disease resistance.

Strawberry Diseases and Pests

The major pests and diseases of strawberries are aphids, red spider mite, slugs, powdery mildew and botrytis. [Click here](#) to go to the GardenAction Pests and Disease Control Center which has a section dedicated to strawberry pests and diseases.