

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).

Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mgghelp@masshort.org.

Backyard Berries – Strawberries

Grow your own strawberries. They are rich with vitamins and delicious to eat. Growing your own is more economical and they will be free from pesticide residues.

Need:

Strawberry Plants

Garden or container with full sun

Spade

Straw

1. Purchase plants from a reputable nursery. Select plants with large crowns and healthy, light colored roots. There are three types of strawberry plants: June Bearing, Ever Bearing, and Day Neutral. June Bearing strawberries produce a single, large crop every year during a 2 to 3 week period in spring and send out many runners. Generally the June Bearing varieties produce larger fruits than Ever Bearing and Day Neutral varieties. Ever Bearing strawberries produce two or three harvests of fruit intermittently during the growing season. Day Neutral strawberries produce fruit throughout the growing season. Ever Bearing and Day Neutral strawberries produce few runners and are better for smaller spaces.

2. Choose a sunny garden spot avoiding a site where potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cranberries, or strawberries have grown in the past three years. These crops are susceptible to the same insects and diseases. Strawberries grow best in a well-drained, sandy loam soil with a pH from 5.8 to 6.2. In the spring as soon as the soil is dry enough to be worked, or in late fall, dig a hole slightly larger than the root ball. Mix the soil with 1 to 2 inches of compost or well-rotted manure. Make a hole large enough to spread the roots. Make a hill in the center of the hole to raise the crown to soil level. Spread the roots downward on the hill. The soil should cover the tops of the roots, but not the crown.

For June Bearing strawberries use the matted row system since they produce many runners. Plant them 18 to 24 inches apart. Rows should be 36 to 42 inches from center to center. Pinch off all

flowers during the first year in the garden to encourage plant vigor and production of runners. This means no crop the first year but better future crops and several more years of production. As runners form, train them along the row spacing them 6 to 9 inches apart. Press the runners gently into the soil and hold in place with a rock or cover with ½ inch of soil until roots form. Do not cut off the runner from the mother plant.

Day Neutral and Ever Bearing strawberries focus their energy on producing multiple harvests rather than growing runner so the hill system works best for them. Space plants 12 to 15 inches apart in a row. The first year, remove all runners and flowers until July 1st then allow them to produce fruit. Multiple harvests are exhausting on plants so they should be replaced about every 3 years or whenever they seem to slow in vigor.

3. If using a strawberry pot, plant one to three plants on top. You can put additional plants in the pockets on the side or wait for the top ones to mature and produce runners. Use an acidic potting mix.

4. Mulch with straw between plants after planting to keep the soil temperature cool, reduce weeds and keep the fruit off the soil. Don't use black plastic because it will raise the soil temperature and harm the plants. To prevent injury to the crowns in the winter, when the temperature drops to 20 F, cover strawberry plants with several inches of straw or pine needles that can be easily removed in the spring.

5. Fertilize in the spring with a 10-10-10 garden fertilizer at the rate of one pound per 100 sq. ft. Fertilize again after renovation of June Bearers or second harvest of Day Neutral and Ever Bearing types.

6. Plants need an inch of water a week. If there is not sufficient rain you will need to water them.

7. Let the fruit ripen on the plant, picking your strawberries when they are red and juicy.

8. Enjoy the fruits of your labor!

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>