

Growing Strawberries in Montana



Strawberries are one of the easiest and most popular small fruits for the home gardener. Why buy tasteless, commercially produced berries from the supermarket when you can enjoy sweet and flavorful strawberries in your own backyard! The homeowner can grow strawberries in small places, like flower borders or even in attractive containers on your patio or balcony.

There are two main types of cultivated strawberries. **June-bearing** strawberries produce a very heavy crop of large fruit in the spring. This would be a good choice if you are growing berries for making preserves because you don't need many plants, and once you're done picking you can relax. **Ever-bearing** strawberries will produce a steady crop of berries from spring through fall. Overall yields are about the same or slightly less than June-bearing varieties.

Site—The best strawberries are produced in full sun. Don't plant any fruit in low-lying areas where frost pockets can form. This is especially true with strawberries since the plants are low to the ground and bloom very early, making them especially subject to frost damage.

Soil—Strawberries need well-drained, rich, moist soil. If your soil is heavy clay, you may need to plant strawberries in 8" raised planters to ensure good drainage. Work some compost into the soil before planting. Soil pH should be between 5.5 and 6.5 for best results, although they can be grown in soils with pH values near 7.5 with relatively few problems. Strawberries are susceptible to Verticillium wilt and should not be grown in areas previously planted with potatoes, tomatoes or peppers.

Water and Fertilizer—Consistent watering is essential when plants are first set and during dry periods in spring and summer. The soil should be kept moist but not water logged. Too much water may predispose the plants to disease. Irrigate in the morning to reduce rot. Critical irrigation periods occur during harvest or in late August and fall. Before planting, incorporate 2 pounds of a balanced fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, per 100 square feet to the bed. During the growing season, fertilize ever-bearers with small amounts of a balanced fertilizer as a top dress after harvest. Be sure the foliage is dry at application and sweep fertilizer granules off the leaves to reduce the chances of burning the foliage.

Planting—Before planting, be sure to remove all weeds from the planting bed. Weeds are a very serious threat to strawberries. Plant strawberries in the spring to the same depth that they grew in the nursery. At planting, set plants two feet apart in the row with their crowns at soil level. Firm the soil about the plants and water them in. If you can lift the plants with a quick jerk on a leaf, the soil is too loose, and the roots may dry out.

Matted row planting—The most popular form of planting in home gardens. Set plants 1 1/2 to 2 feet apart in rows 3 to 4 feet apart. Runners from initial planting are allowed to fill in to form a solid planting, until it reaches approximately one plant every 5 to 8 inches. Remove excess plants or runners. This method of planting produces the greatest number of fruits, but berry size is small.

Hill planting—This is a method of planting in which all runners are removed and the original plants maintained. Space individual plants 15 to 18 inches apart, and place them in rows 2 1/2 to 3 feet apart. Remove all runners. The hill system provides the largest fruits but the smallest number of fruit.

Spaced row—This method is a compromise between the other systems and is probably the best suited to the home garden. Remove all but four runners from each mother and arrange these so that they are evenly spaced about the mother plant. Hold them in place with small stones or bobby pins.

With June-bearing varieties, remove all flowering stalks that develop during the first season as soon as they appear. Letting new plants fruit before they have become established will permanently reduce their vigor and productivity. Remove the first flower stalks to appear on everbearing cultivars. These would produce the first crop of the season. If plants become well-established and appear vigorous, let the plants produce the second fall crop in the first season.



Landscaping &
Garden Center

Mulching— It is important to add a mulch around the roots of strawberries during the growing season.

Applying several inches of straw, bark or pine needles or laying a weed fabric around the strawberry plant helps retain moisture, keeps the fruit clean, and helps reduce weeds. Before a hard freeze, add a mulch of pine needles or straw on top of the plants to protect them from drying winds and help prevent soil heaving. Be sure to take the mulch off early in the spring, before new growth begins.

Harvesting—Harvest berries in the early morning if possible and place in the refrigerator immediately. Do not wash the berries before refrigerating unless you will use the fruit within a few hours. Picking berries when they are wet or cooling them with water hastens fruit rot. With optimum conditions, fresh strawberries have a shelf life of about seven days.

Varieties We Carry

- **Fort Laramie** is an ever-bearing variety that is very hardy and productive.

RECIPES

Recipes courtesy of Cascade County Extension Agency

Strawberry Pudding

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1/4 lb. Butter | 1/4 c. sugar |
| 1/4 c. sugar | 1 c. fresh strawberries |
| 6 egg yolks | 6 egg whites |
| 1 tsp. baking soda | 1 c. flour |
| dissolved in 2 Tbsp. milk | 1/4 c. sugar |
| 2 c. fresh strawberries | |

Coat the bottom and sides of a plain quart mold with a tablespoon of butter. Using a large mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar together until they are light and fluffy. Beat in the egg yolks one at a time. Beat in the flour, making sure all the ingredients are well mixed. With a rubber spatula, fold in the strawberries being careful not to mash them. Using an electric beater, beat the egg whites until they form unwavering peaks when the beaters are lifted out of the bowl. Quickly stir the baking soda and milk into the batter and then gently fold in the egg whites. Pour this mixture into the mold and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Place the mold in a roasting pan and fill it with water to half-way up the sides of the mold. Bring the water to a boil over high heat, cover roasting pan tightly. Reduce heat and simmer for 2 hours. Remove the mold from the pan and let rest for a minute or so. Remove the foil, place a pie plate on top of the mold and quickly turn over. Crush the cup of strawberries, stir in sugar, let stand 10 minutes. Pour over pudding before serving.

Wild Strawberry Pie

Pastry for 1 9-inch crust
Strawberry filling (recipe below)

Preheat oven to 400°. Using a large mixing bowl, make pastry and form the dough into a ball, wrap in wax paper and refrigerate for easier handling. Remove from refrigerator after 1 hour and roll out the dough to 1/4" thickness. Line 9-inch pie plate and bake for 15 minutes.

Old-Fashioned Strawberry Preserves

Recipe courtesy of www.epicurious.com

This simple, delicious treat is excellent spread over scones or toast and comes together in practically no time at all.

3 pints fresh strawberries, hulled
2 cups sugar

Place hulled strawberries in heavy large saucepan and mash coarsely. Cook strawberries over medium heat until beginning to thicken, stirring frequently, about 6 minutes. Reduce heat to low. Add 2 cups sugar and stir until dissolved. Increase heat to medium and boil gently until mixture thickens and mounds on spoon, stirring frequently, about 20 minutes. Remove saucepan from heat. Cool. (Preserves can be prepared 1 week ahead. Refrigerate in an airtight container.) Makes about 3 cups.

Strawberry Filling

1 c. fresh strawberries, crushed
1/2 c. sugar
1 c. water
2 Tbsp. Cornstarch

Pour the crushed strawberries and sugar into a 2 quart saucepan and place over low heat. Add the water with the cornstarch mixed into it. Cook until thick and syrupy. Pack the cooked pie crust full of ripe juicy strawberries and when the syrup is ready, pour it over the berries in the crust. Cool and serve with whipped cream, dry milk whipped topping or low-fat whip.



2025 2nd Ave. NW
Great Falls, MT 59404
Phone: 406-727-0950 Fax: 406-727-4817
Email: mail@forde-nursery.com
www.forde-nursery.com

