

Year Round Gardening

Growing Strawberries in the Pikes Peak Region

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Having a strawberry bed as part of your landscape is quite achievable in our area, even at high altitude. Key factors for success are plant selection, location, soil, proper planting and perhaps protection from wildlife.

There are three major categories of strawberries. June bearing varieties produce one large crop per year. Contrary to the name that crop will more likely be in July, than June in Colorado. Ever-bearing cultivars produce two crops per year, the berries are smaller than June bearing, but they are more reliable in the event of a late freeze. If the spring crop is lost because the blossoms freeze, the late summer crop is still to come. Day neutral varieties produce throughout the summer. Production is smaller both in fruit size and quantity. Hot weather may stop production. They are somewhat higher maintenance, requiring frequent fertilization and removal of runners.



Overall, ever-bearing varieties are probably the best bet for our region. Fort Laramie and Quinalt are two recommended cultivars.

The most important factor in terms of location is sun. Strawberries need full sun, at least 6 hours a day of direct sunlight, more if possible. If you are replacing sod with a strawberry bed there is one additional consideration. Grubs which may have been undetected in the sod can damage the strawberry plants. If you are unsure about the presence of grubs in the sod then it may be best to remove the sod and not plant your berries till the following year. In the mean-time consider getting your 'crop' started in containers.

Soil preference for strawberries is a sandy loam. However, strawberries can tolerate different soil types. Amend with organic matter to improve tilth. Fertilize at a rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Use a balanced fertilizer that contains nitrogen, phosphate and potassium (NPK). If you are unsure of your soil type consider having a soil test done through Colorado State University. Extension has the kits and mailers, you can pick them up 17 N Spruce St. Monday through Friday from 8 to 5.

Strawberries are fussy about planting depth. The crown of the plant must be at the soil line. Too deep and it might rot. Too shallow the roots will dry out. The pattern of planting rows will depend on the type of strawberry you choose to plant. Please consult the resource below for specific instructions.

The first season of planting you should remove the first flowers. After July 1 you can allow them to develop into fruit. Fertilize regularly, in autumn keep the soil damp till the first frost. Then withhold water to harden the plant. Water in late November (assuming no snow on the ground) and mulch well with clean straw. The mulch should stay on until the plants are actively growing.

You may find that the birds in your garden get the berries before you do. If that is the case use some bird netting on top of the bed to keep them off.

For more information check out CMG GardenNotes #763 "Growing Strawberries in Colorado Gardens." Which can be found at <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/gardennotes/763.pdf>.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by ask.extension.org. any time day or night. Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. you can phone 520-7684 or emailing CSUmg2@elpasoco.com.

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