



**Spencer Horticultural Solutions**

# Homegrown Horticulture

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

## Growing Strawberries

Almost everyone loves strawberries. The obvious exceptions would be those that are allergic to them (understandable), and one person that I know of that hates them (whom I consider to be an exceptional outlier). But other than that, strawberries are pretty popular. If you've never had a fresh-from-the-field/plant strawberry, I can assure you that it is a life-changing experience. It's sweet, firm but soft, and it is bursting with flavour.

Can you grow strawberries at home? Absolutely. You might not get the yields that a professional grower will get, but that hardly matters. The real joy comes in the journey (and the treats at the end).

For simplicity, there are essentially 2 different types of strawberries. One is called a June-bearing strawberry. This type of strawberry is planted one year and then will produce fruit for a 4 to 6 week period in July and early August (in Alberta) in each of the next years. You have to take the time to establish the plants before getting fruit. It sets up fruit buds in the late days of the summer (short days), which will be next year's crop.

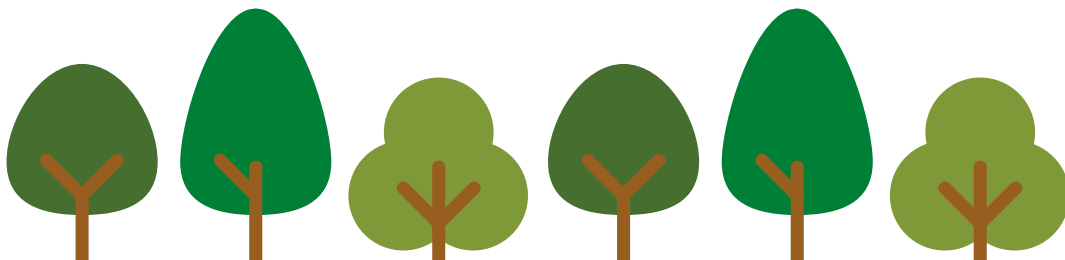
The other is a day neutral strawberry, or a photoperiod insensitive plant. I think that you might also call them everbearing. These plants will leaf, root, runner, flower, and fruit regardless of the day length. As such, you can plant them one year and get fruit that same year, albeit later in the summer and through early fall. They are shallower rooted than June-bearing strawberries and will need water and fertilizer carefully managed.

You can grow both of these types similarly, but there are differences. I'll try and outline the differences, while giving you some tips for growing strawberries in your yard.

Strawberries can grow on most types of soil but prefer a mid-textured loam soil. Well-drained soil and lots of sun are also important. If there is a way to give them some shelter/protection from the wind, that's also good. Some wind is ok, but not high winds.

Most strawberries come from the nursery as a bareroot crown. In stores, that'll be a box, with the dormant, leafless crown contained in a bag with some sort of medium to hold it. This is similar to what you'll find for plants like asparagus, or some perennial flowers. You might also find actively growing plants that are essentially transplants. You would plant the bareroot plant much earlier than the transplant. Plant them out once the soil has thawed and can be worked easily. The transplants go in once the risk of frost has passed.

One of the keys with strawberries is to get the crown placed at the right depth. You want it so that the growing point is above the surface of the soil, but the crown is mostly below the surface. You don't want any roots exposed. It is also important for the soil to be slightly damp and that you pack the plants in after planting, otherwise they won't take as well. Giving them a bit of a fertilizer boost at planting with some water won't hurt them. Use a water soluble, high phosphorus fertilizer solution.



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For June-bearing strawberries, you will now focus on letting them root and send out runners, which are essentially daughter plants that will be the basis of your productive stand for years to come. You should make sure that you drag in the runners to make the patch a bit more compact and less spread out than if you left it alone. Remove any flower clusters that emerge, since those will take away from rooting and runnering efforts of the plant. They divert energy and focus, which we don't want.

For Day-neutral strawberries, you can go 2 ways. You can plant them thicker and push the plants hard to produce fruit for one year, and then start over fresh the next year, or you can let them establish a bit like the June-bearing types. If you are pushing hard, you might remove runners, while leaving the blossoms that will come. If you are establishing runners, then just leave things alone.

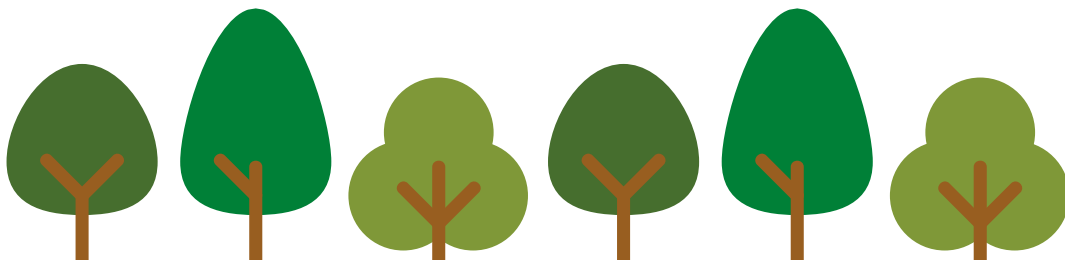
For both types, you should water regularly, as they are shallow rooted. Don't keep them soggy, but they shouldn't go ages between watering. You should also fertilize the day-neutrals; they need a little shot of fertilizer every other week. For June-bearers, in the first year, give them a bit once they start to runner, and then maybe a bit in mid-August. Then, once they are established, each year, give them a bit of fertilizer in the spring and early summer, then a bit more after harvest is wrapped up (before mid-August).

You can occasionally give the plants a bit of a haircut after harvest each year (this is more for JB than DN), and you might narrow the rows back a bit. Over time, the original crowns are going to be useless, but the daughters will have replaced them. For JB, you can probably go 3 or 4 years on the same plants, but refreshing the planting once in a while will be necessary.

For the DN, you can push them hard for the year. Harvest will usually be in late summer, but may give you 2 flushes, a light, early one, then a later, heavy one. Since they aren't as focused on multi-year production, you might need to work to reestablish the planting regularly. You could dig out healthy daughter plants in the spring, remove older junk, and replant those daughters to start again. If you keep on the fertilizer and water, you should find them to be pretty productive. Day-neutrals are sensitive to high temperatures. If temperatures get up around 28C while they are flowering, you need to give them a bit of a sprinkle to cool the air off, otherwise they'll stop flowering and you'll have no fruit a month later.

If you are going to overwinter strawberries, just make sure that they have a good cover of snow that is stable. Or you can put on a layer of straw (4-6 inches) over them after a couple of light frosts. The plants will start to turn a bit red and can then be covered. You can uncover them in the spring once a bit of careful digging reveals some light green new growth. The straw is good to have underneath them, as it cuts down on disease and conserves moisture.

If you want to grow strawberries in pots, use a DN strawberry, and don't skimp on the fertilizer and water, as they will need it more than ever, since they can't draw upon the soil reserves.



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