

University of Kentucky---College of Agriculture

EXTENSION DIVISION

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Circular No. 238

July, 1930

Published in connection with the agricultural extension work carried on by cooperation of the College of Agriculture, University of Kentucky, with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and distributed in furtherance of the work provided for in the Act of Congress of May 8, 1914.

Strawberries For The Garden

By A. J. OLNEY

The strawberry is a delicious fruit and should be grown generally in home gardens. It is the first of the summer fruits to ripen and thereby furnishes variety for the table when the supply of other fruits is limited. The average yield of a matted row 300 feet long is about 50 quarts, but 125 quarts is not unusual if the patch is given good care. A planting of this size should meet the requirements of the average family.

SOILS AND FERTILIZERS

Strawberries succeed on a variety of soils. Loams which are well supplied with organic matter are preferred. Usually strawberries do best following tobacco or other cultivated crops. Sod land may harbor cutworms and the white grub; therefore it should be avoided.

Most soils are improved by stable manure applied at the rate of a half-ton to 1,000 square feet, supplemented by 15 pounds of 16% superphosphate. However, garden soils which have been manured regularly for several years may be so rich that top growth is made at the expense of fruitfulness. Such soils are benefited by an application of superphosphate only.

PLANTS

Large, vigorous plants which have not borne a crop of fruit should be used. Such plants make early runners and the plants from these are more productive than those formed late. The surest way to secure good plants is to raise them. A row 10 feet long should furnish about 200 plants from runners for setting a year later. Some varieties produce more runner plants than others.

CARE AFTER RECEIVING PLANTS

If plants are purchased from a nursery they should be set at once or "heeled in" until the planting can be done. "Heeling in" is done by opening the bundles, placing the plants in a thin row in a shallow furrow and covering the roots with moist soil, pressing it firmly about them. If the plants seem dry, water the roots when opening the bundles.

PLANTING

The best time for setting strawberry plants is as early in the spring as the soil can be worked. It is seldom possible to get a good stand when planting is done in the late spring. Usually the matted row system of planting is preferred. Most growers make the rows four feet apart, and set the plants 18 inches apart in the row. At this distance, 200 plants will be required for a row 300 feet long. Care should be taken to set the plants at the same depth they grew originally. If the soil is in good condition and pressed firmly around the roots when the plants are set, watering will not be necessary. All plants which fail to grow should be replaced immediately.

VARIETIES

Varieties are divided into two classes, those which have perfect flowers and so are able to bear fruit when planted alone, and those which have imperfect flowers and must be planted near a perfect flowered variety to produce fruit. If a variety having imperfect flowers is planted, every fourth row should be one having perfect flowers. The following are a few of the more important varieties for Kentucky. All have perfect flowers.

Aroma: The principal variety grown for the shipping market in Kentucky. The berries are large, of good quality, and ripen in late midseason. Aroma seems to succeed everywhere except in the Bluegrass region.

Premier: Probably the most popular variety for home gardens and the local market. It is grown to some extent for shipping. It is a vigorous grower and productive. The berries are large, of good quality, and ripen early. It is consistently the best-yielding variety all over Kentucky.

Senator Dunlap: A vigorous variety which has had wide popularity for many years, but is gradually being replaced by Premier. The berries are of medium size and good quality.

Gandy: One of the best late ripening varieties. The berries are medium to large and of fair quality. This variety is susceptible to leaf spot.

Blakemore: A new variety which was introduced recently by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Plantings in Kentucky are too recent to establish its adaptability in this region. However, the tests which have been made with it are most promising. The plants are healthy and vigorous, and the berries are large, firm and of excellent quality.

Everbearers: Are popular with home gardeners because they produce fruit in the late summer and fall as well as at the usual strawberry season in the spring. Usually the yield is too small to attract commercial growers, but everbearers furnish a welcome luxury for the table when there are no strawberries on the market. The Mastodon is the principal variety grown in Kentucky.

CULTIVATION

Cultivation should begin soon after the plants are set and continue at ten-day intervals until about the middle of August. If horse-drawn tools are used, the amount of hand hoeing needed to keep out the weeds will be greatly reduced. No cultivation is done in the spring before harvest.

CARE OF THE PATCH AFTER HARVEST

Immediately after the harvesting season is over, cultivation should be started again. The rows should be narrowed to about 8 inches, and given a side dressing of sulfate of ammonia or nitrate of soda, at the rate of about 200 pounds per acre, or one pound to 50 feet of row. Care should be taken to avoid putting the fertilizer directly on the plants, since burning may result.

MULCHING

A mulch of straw applied in late fall is beneficial. The mulch prevents heaving of the plants caused by alternate freezing and thawing, and also keeps the berries clean during the ripening period the following spring. About one ton of straw is needed per acre, or one bale to 300 feet of row.

AGE OF PATCH

The finest berries are secured in the first crop after the plants are set. For this reason some prefer to set a new patch each year and plow it up as soon as the crop is picked. However, many growers harvest two or three crops from one planting. Profitable renewal of the patch depends on the stand of plants and the freedom from weeds.

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