

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Strawberries

**S**trawberries produce fruit in May and June. Even in a small garden, there is room for one or two strawberry plants that can bear fruit for several years.

## Varieties

Strawberries are perennial plants in Kentucky. This means you can plant them once and they will provide fruit for many years. Strawberries are grouped based on the time they produce fruit: June-bearing, everbearing, and day-neutral. You cannot tell the difference between these types by looking at them.

June-bearing varieties are more likely to do well in Kentucky. They bear fruit between late May and early July. Try any of these June-bearing types for a home garden.

- **Earliglow** (early) produces medium-sized fruit and has good disease resistance. It is an early producer with good flavor.
- **Galletta** (early) produces large, glossy fruit with good flavor. It has good disease resistance and grows well in heavy soil.
- **Flavorfest** (midseason) produces a lot of large fruit, grows well, and has some disease resistance.
- **Allstar** (medium late) has large, sweet fruit with good disease resistance. It is good for fresh eating.
- **Jewel** (medium late) has great quality and produces large, firm fruit. It often has a longer season.
- **AC Valley Sunset** (late) produces large fruit with great taste.

Each strawberry plant is called a crown. The crown is the short, thick stem where the roots meet the shoots and leaves. Strawberries are usually sold in bundles of 10 or 25 crowns. After fruiting each year, the crown makes runners. A runner is a long stem that grows along the ground and will produce one or more new plants.



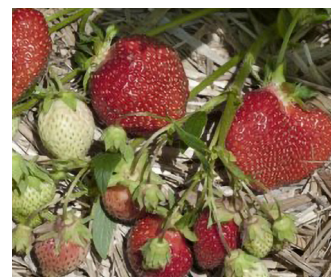
**Earliglow**  
Nourse Farms



**Galletta**  
Nourse Farms



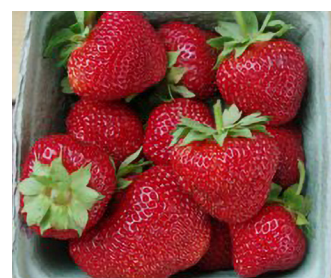
**Flavorfest**  
Nourse Farms



**Allstar**  
Nourse Farms



**Jewel**  
Nourse Farms



**AC Valley Sunset**  
Nourse Farms

## How much to plant

Twenty-five strawberry plants are enough for a family of four to enjoy fresh fruit. You need about a 25 foot row for this many plants or a five-foot-by-five-foot bed. Each plant can produce about one quart of fruit in the year after planting. Plant more if you also want to make jams and baked goods.

## When and how to plant

Plant strawberries in a spot with full sun and well-draining soil. Strawberry plants will need water often, so pick a spot that you can easily water.

A late-spring frost can hurt your fruit. Since cold air flows downhill and forms frost pockets, it is best to plant on higher ground. Also, do not plant where plants from the tomato family (potatoes, eggplant, and peppers) have grown to avoid disease issues.

Fruit yield is often better when plants are grown in raised beds. This may also prevent root rot. You can make a row of mounded soil or build a raised bed with bricks, pavers, stone, or untreated wood and fill with soil. See [Preparing your Garden](#) (NEP-219) for more tips.

Plant bare-root strawberry crowns in early spring (late March through early April).

Before planting, soak the bare roots in water for several hours. To plant, remove each crown from the bundle and trim off any yellow or dead leaves. If any roots are too long, cut them back to five or six inches long. Make a hole for each plant or dig a trench for a whole row of plants.

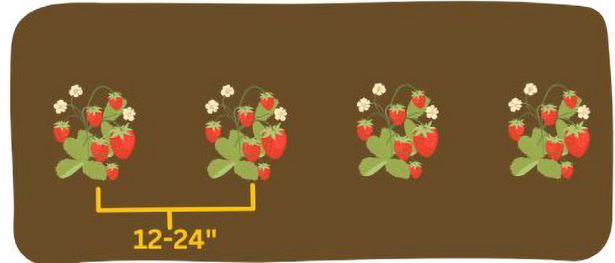


Bare-root strawberry crowns  
Garden Spot Nursery, Bellingham, WA

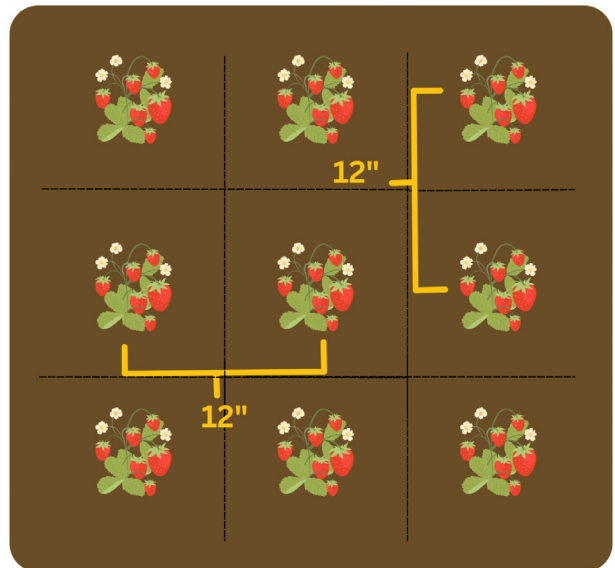
## Strawberry Planting

**Depth** Cover roots with at least 1 inch of soil

**Row Planting** 12-24" between crowns



**Bed Planting** 1 crown per square foot



### Safe Planting Dates

late March through early April



The hole or trench should be deep enough for the roots to stretch to the bottom. Spread out the roots and fill in with soil. The roots should be fully covered. The soil should be halfway up the crown, as shown in the planting-depth illustration.

Add a layer of mulch (straw, wood chips, or shredded leaves) to help keep the soil moist and keep leaves and fruit from touching the soil. For the first year, pick off any blossoms that appear. The plants need to grow strong roots first before making fruit the next year. The plant will also send out runners. Runners are long stems, also called stolons, that each plant makes in the summer that can form roots and make new plants.

Before winter, cover the plants with about two inches of straw to protect them from the cold. In the following spring, you will see the plants start to yellow. This means that they are growing again and need more sunlight. When you see this, remove the straw from the plants.

In spring, when the plants are blooming lightly cover strawberries overnight if there will be a hard frost. A hard frost is when temperatures will stay below 28 degrees F for a few hours. You can use a sheet or light cloth to help protect the blossoms.

## Pests and diseases

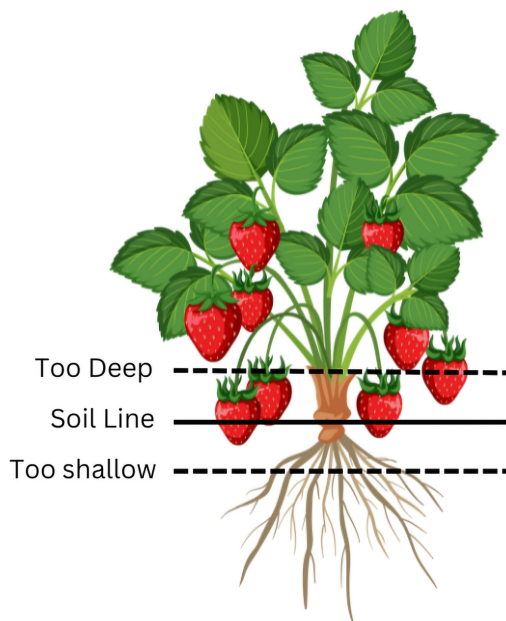
There are many diseases that can affect strawberries.

You can remove slugs by hand and drop them in soapy water or salt. They are most active at night, so search with a flashlight. You can also sprinkle diatomaceous earth around plants in dry weather to repel them. Keep your strawberry bed mulched and bordered with straw to help prevent pests and protect fruit.

If you notice a foamy residue on plants, you may have spittlebugs. This is not a serious problem. Leaf spots are also common but do not often lead to major problems with your fruit.

Gray mold (*Botrytis*) is a fungus that causes dark spots on the fruit and may cover the fruit with gray fuzz. Remove diseased fruit and take it out of the strawberry patch to reduce the spread of gray mold. Harvest fruit with care and refrigerate soon after harvest. Try not to splash water on the leaves or fruit when watering. Mulching also helps reduce gray mold.

Strawberries are also prone to other diseases. If your plants start to have a lot of problems, it may be time to start another patch with fresh plants in a different part of the garden. For more tips on fighting pests and diseases, see the UK Cooperative Extension publication [Disease and Insect Control Programs for Homegrown Fruit in Kentucky \(ID-21\)](#) or talk to your county Extension agent.



Plant strawberry crowns with soil halfway up the crown.  
*Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky*



A strawberry blossom beginning to form fruit. Remove blossoms the year of planting to help the plant root well.  
*Jann Knappage, University of Kentucky*



Gray mold or botrytis starting to show on a strawberry  
*Madeline Dowling, Clemson University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0*

## Harvest

You can harvest strawberries the year after you plant them. For June-bearing strawberries, harvest most often starts in late May and lasts through June or early July. Pick ripe fruit daily or every other day. Harvest strawberries by gently tugging the fruit off the long stem. Part of the stem may break off as well. Put freshly harvested fruit in the refrigerator soon after picking.

## Renovation

In late June or early July, after all fruit is harvested, it is time to renovate the strawberry beds. Thin out older plants so the newer plants have room to grow. Remaining crowns will grow runners that produce new plants for next summer's strawberries. Follow these steps:

1. Remove any weeds.
2. Trim off old strawberry leaves but be careful not to hurt the crowns.

**Row planting:** Trim off any crowns outside of the 12-inch-wide planting area. Thin out old plants within the row until they are four to six inches apart.

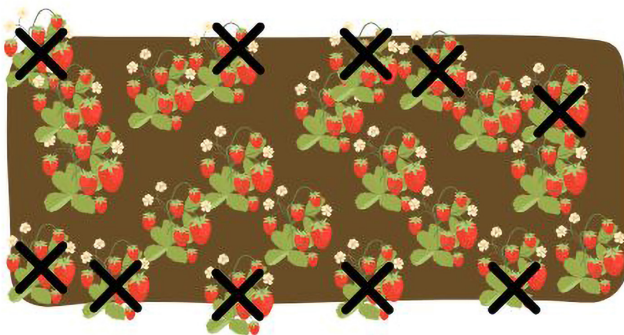
**Bed planting:** Trim or remove older plants leaving 1 to 2 plants per square foot.

3. Put one-half inch to one inch of soil, mulch, or compost on top of the bed around the plants.
4. Fertilize if needed. Follow product instructions. For best results, have the soil tested every few years. Contact your county Extension office to get a soil test.

## Strawberry Bed Renovation

### Row Plantings

Before Renovation

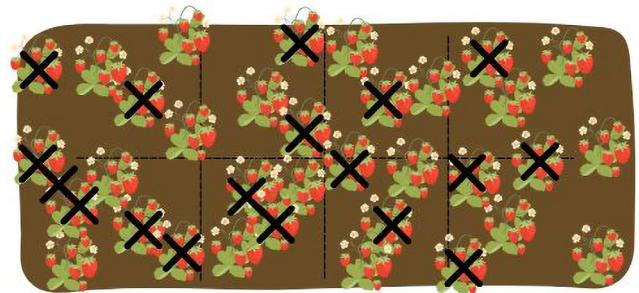


After Renovation  
thin back to 12-18" wide bed

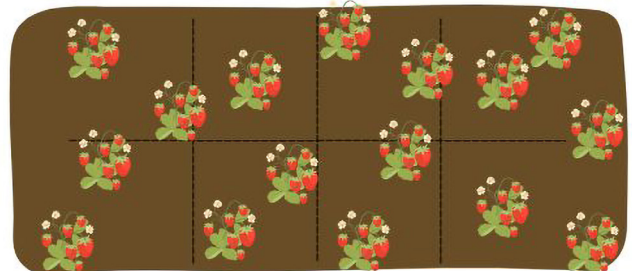


### Bed Plantings

Before Renovation



After Renovation  
1 to 2 plants per square foot





After you renovate the strawberry beds, they may not look pretty, but this step can help keep plants productive for years to come. If you can, move your strawberry planting to a new spot every five years to avoid disease buildup in the soil.

In late fall each year, be sure to lightly cover strawberry plants with about two inches of straw or leaves to protect them until spring.

## Serving

Strawberries are tasty fresh or cooked. Gently wash fruit before eating. They make great jams, pies, sauces, muffins, cakes, and other desserts. You can strain cooked berry products to remove seeds, if you prefer.

## Storage

Ripe fruit will keep for at least a couple days in the refrigerator. Do not wash them until you are ready to eat or cook them. You can also freeze fruit for future use.



Freshly picked strawberries  
*Jann Knappage, University of Kentucky*

## Summary

### Varieties

June-bearing strawberries can grow well in Kentucky. There are many recommended varieties to choose from.

### How much to plant

Plant 25 strawberry plants to enjoy fresh fruit for a family.

### How and when to plant

Plant bare-root strawberry crowns in early spring (late March to early April).

### Pests and diseases

Strawberries can get many diseases and pests. Keep your strawberry bed clean and with good air flow to have fewer problems. Straw mulch keeps the fruit off the soil to reduce problems. Remove diseased or damaged fruit. Pick off and destroy slugs.

### Harvest

Ripe fruit will come off when you tug gently. Pick and place in a container. Refrigerate after picking.

### Renovation

After harvesting, renovate your strawberry bed to ensure a good harvest the next year. This includes cutting back the plants, thinning, and adding soil and fertilizer. In late fall, cover with straw or leaf mulch for protection over the winter.

### Serving

Strawberries are tasty fresh or cooked. Gently wash before eating.

### Storage

Fresh fruit will keep for a day or two in the refrigerator.

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