Growing Strawberries at Home

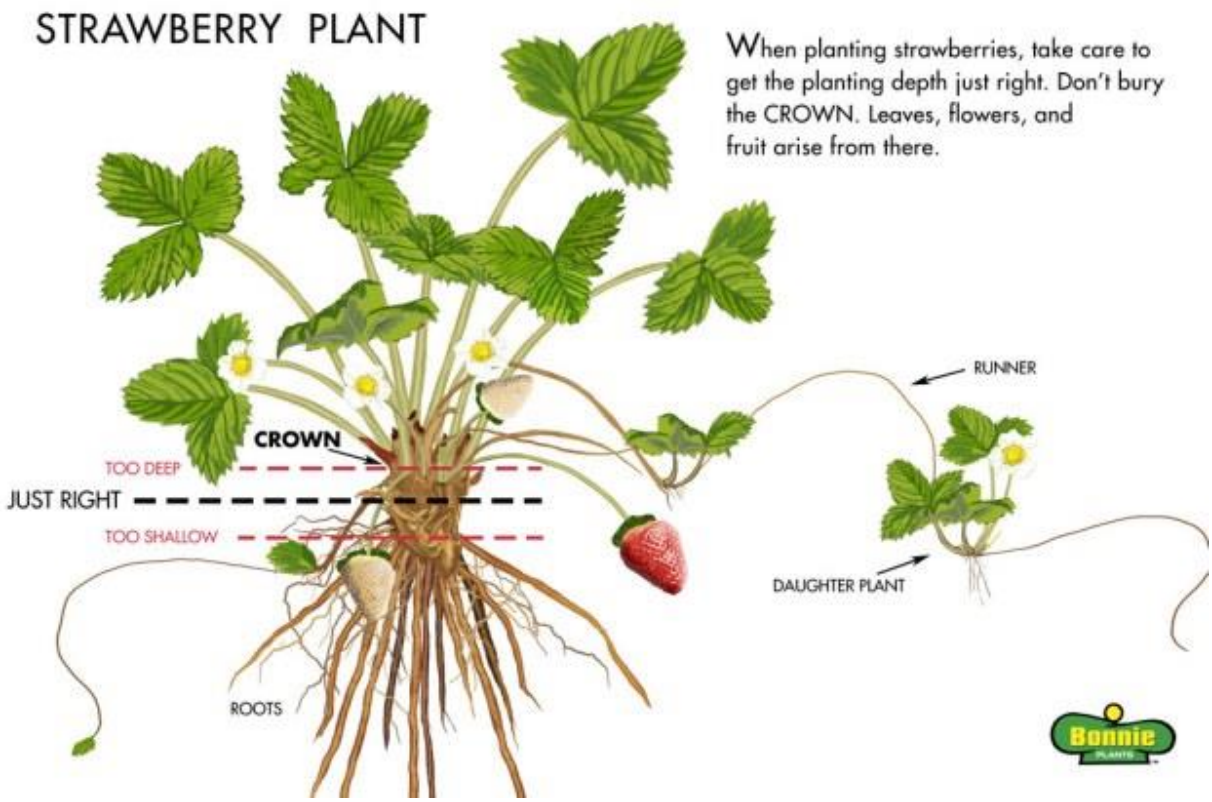
Strawberries can be bought in many different forms for home gardeners. Live containerized plants, seeds and frigo (bare root). Live plants can easily be planted in the ground as you would transplant any other containerized plants. Strawberry seeds are typically Alpine Strawberries which are wild type berries that grow small and very flavorful berries! They make good groundcovers too. Finally, frigo or bare root plants are a great way to get a berry patch established quickly with minimal cost! The most common way we sell strawberries at the Seed House is bare root.

Site Selection

Strawberries like to be planted in locations with full sun. They also prefer to be in moist but well drained soil to help prevent fungal issues. They like slightly acidic pH—about 6.0-6.5.

How Do I Plant Bare Root Strawberries?

After purchasing bare root strawberry plants, it is ideal to get them planted as soon as possible. Prior to planting, soak the roots in a container of water for 30 minutes to rehydrate the plant. Once rehydrated you're ready to plant! Planting depth is very important to strawberries as they are very sensitive to crown rot. See the below image from Bonnie Plants for a guide!



Within your planting hole create a cone that you can position your plant on top of and spread out the roots best you can around the outside of the cone. As you fill with soil, hold onto the plant, and wiggle it up and down to help it settle in. Then water it in gently. Afterword's make sure the strawberry has settled into the correct depth.

Bare Root Strawberry Care

After planting, make sure your strawberry plants do not dry out. Keep the soil moist but not swampy or soaking. If the soil is too wet the roots will develop at a very slow rate. Strawberries have shallow root systems, so it's recommended to mulch the plants to help keep the roots cool and moist. Mulching can also help to keep your plants and fruits clean and provide some extra protection in the winter. This, for example, can be done with plastic, straw, shredded leaves, or grass clippings.

In the first growing season you may not produce fruit. If you plant mid to late spring, you may miss that window of opportunity. Many growers will pinch off any flowers to help the plant put energy into establishing its root system. Ultimately, letting your strawberry grow a few fruits for you to sample will not make a significant difference. As average temperatures start hitting the 80s strawberries start to put fruiting energy into producing runners. During this time is the best time to fertilize strawberries. Strawberries are very light feeders; a common feeding recommendation is a topdressing of bloodmeal once per season. This application must happen late spring to early summer. New growth on a strawberry plant is very tender. Applying Nitrogen (which is the primary benefit from blood meal) encourages green growth. A boost of Nitrogen when its cool and moist in the spring can make this new tender growth push too fast and make it much more susceptible to fungal pathogens like Botrytis. When possible, allow strawberry offshoots an opportunity to establish themselves within your berry patch. Younger plants are more productive. Letting new shoots slowly replace your existing strawberries over a few years' time is a good way to maintain vigor in your berry patch!

Strawberries are very sensitive to fungal pathogens. Try to make sure the leaves are dry going into the night and they have plenty of airflow to make conditions less favorable for diseases.

What is the Difference Between June Bearing Strawberries and Everbearing Varieties?

The biggest difference is the plants' reaction to length of day and air temperature! June bearing strawberries start to suppress flower production when the length of day is over 13 hours or air temps are averaging over 79 degrees. Everbearing varieties will produce longer through the season as they suppress flower production when the days are 16 hours or more or the average air temps are 86 or higher. Essentially June bearing varieties are great for targeted harvest times like trying to get a big crop at one time for making Jam whereas everbearing varieties will produce over a longer period which is more ideal for fresh eating through the summer!

Strawberry Troubleshooting

I keep finding holes in my strawberries!

Most likely an issue with slugs or other hungry insects. There are things you can do to prevent this! First, move to a plastic mulching. This will give insects and slugs less plant material to hide in during the heat

of the day. A second thing you could do is to use an organic product called Sluggo Plus. Surrounding your strawberry plants with this product will help take care of you slugs and other common berry pests. Sometimes Over ripe berries can attract insects too—be sure to pick them when they're ready!

My plant is growing tons of berries but they're all so small!

If you have a strawberry that isn't an Alpine Strawberry (These naturally only grow little berries) this can be fixed with flower or fruit thinning. Strawberry flowers grow in clusters. The first flower and the largest flower is called the Primary flower. This one will produce the largest berries the with most seeds. Pruning out the smaller flowers on the clusters means the plant can put more energy into fewer berries. This might lead to a smaller quantity of berries, but it will give you higher quality berries.

My strawberries are deformed!

The formation of berries is directly linked to development of the seed. As the seeds grow and mature on the outside of the strawberry, they release a hormone that causes the fruit near the seed to develop. If you don't get complete pollination in a flower – meaning pollen was only brought to some of the stigmas in the flower and not all of them- only the pollinated ones will grow. Imagine having a bone-dry sponge and dripping water on it. Where you drop the water, the sponge will swell up if you drip water in an irregular pattern on the sponge the surface will be lumpy. Similar happens to a strawberry! Those drops can represent the seeds developing and the dry spots being seeds that aren't.

We can increase pollination a few different ways. First, we can draw in more with the addition of pollinator friendly flowers. Wildflowers are a great option! Honeybees and Bumble Bees are great pollinators for strawberries. Drawing these into your yard will help! Second, making sure that you limit pesticide use in your yard will make sure you don't kill beneficial insects that may pollinate your flowers. Finally, keep an eye out for tarnished plant bugs. These insects can eat the developing seed which can lead to malformed fruits too.

Research shows having more than one variety of strawberry can increase pollination, berry quality and yield! Consider adding a second or third variety to your patch to increase your yield and quality.

How can I store the bare root strawberries until I am ready to plant them?

Storing bare root plants in cold (38-45 degrees F) and humid environments is the best way to keep them viable until you can plant. If this isn't an option, planting your bare root plants in containers with potting mix is the next best way to keep them alive for longer periods of time. Once planted in the containers, keep moist and store somewhere out of aggressive sunlight. From there they can be transplanted whenever you're ready!