

Welsh Fruit Stocks Strawberry Growing Guide



Strawberry plants are of the genus *Fragaria*; they grow close to the ground and produce trifoliate leaves from a central crown. A strawberry plant should produce a good crop of fruit for 2-3 years, although with a good home they can last five or even six years.

They present white flowers with yellow centres which mature into the bright red strawberry berries which are great from jams, preserves, juices, baking, ice creams or just eating! Depending on the variety they produce fruit from June until August; early flowerers may need protection from frosts.

The plant sends out new growth in the form of runners, where a new plant forms on the end of a stem from the mother plant. These runners can be removed to encourage more generous fruiting. If left to runner a row of strawberry plants will create a good covering of strawberry plants within a bed. Runners can be carefully dug up and moved to a new site during the winter months if required.

We plant our own runners each spring from our own PHPS certified SE or E grade material. These runners become the parent plants, and they go on to produce their own runners throughout the summer months. These PHPS certified (E or A grade) runners are lifted from our fields and despatched direct to our customers from mid-late October through until April or May (depending on the season).

We offer a wide selection of strawberry varieties for you to choose from, each with their own set of characteristics. Your choice of variety will be affected by your preferred fruiting season, the location and site, taste, and any other varietal characteristics that may catch your eye.

Planting

Location and Soil

Strawberry plants will do best in a sunny location, sheltered from strong winds. They prefer damp but free-draining soil. It is best to keep new spring growth protected from late ground frosts, so a higher area within your garden may be favourable. Try to plant on clean ground which has not grown strawberry plants for several years. We also recommend that they are not planted in soil that has recently grown potatoes, tomatoes or peppers, as these can carry verticillium wilt in the soil, although nowadays it is possible to select varieties which are resistant to this. To avoid wireworm and leatherjackets we also recommend not growing strawberry plants in soil that was recently grassed over.

Strawberry plants can also grow well in raised beds, containers and baskets, provided the soil is deep enough and moisture levels are carefully monitored. The roots of our strawberry plants can be 20cm long (depending on the variety and season) so ensure your container is deep enough to hold the roots vertically without any curling.

Preparation

We recommend that you plant the strawberry plants into a well prepared, weed free bed, dug down to at least a spade's depth. Ideally, this should be done about a month before planting, and supplemented with plenty of well-rotted manure or compost.

Planting Method

Dig a hole in loose tilth into which plenty of compost has been mixed. Place the roots against one side of the hole **ensuring they are vertical and not curled up**. Pull the soil back against the roots and firm down very well with your feet to ensure firm placement without air around the roots. It is very important that the crown lies at ground level after firming, with no roots exposed, but leaving the crown still clearly visible (soil about half way up the crown).

Plant the plants 18" (45cm) apart with rows 3' feet apart (90cm). If dry, water them well until established. Keep weeds away by hoeing, but make sure the soil always remains just up to the crown on the plant.

Fruiting and Cropping

Flowers and Runners

Depending on your season, the earliest strawberry varieties can crop outside from about the third week in June, and the latest until about the second week in August. You can bring forward the cropping dates by growing under protection in a greenhouse, polytunnel or fleece.

Your strawberry plants should produce both flowers and runners (the new plant growth). It is fine to let the plants flower in their first summer whether planted in the autumn or spring before, provided the plant is doing well. It is better to take off the flowers if the plant is struggling, for whatever reason. We recommend removing the runners from the plants in the summer as this should produce stronger plants and bigger fruit. You may however decide to let the plants runner into a "matted row" where you can root 6-9 runners per plant which will bring you more fruit next year.

Please note that under the terms of the Plant Breeders Act 1964, many of our strawberry plant varieties (marked* in our shop) should not be propagated for resale without a license.

Pollination

Strawberry flowers need to be insect pollinated. If the plants are being grown under protection, it is important to open them up for at least part of the day to allow insects in. Problems may also occur in wind-prone locations where insects prefer not to visit, so we recommend that you plant your plants in a sheltered location for the best results. Sometimes poor pollination can create misshapen fruit. The flowers will need protection from any late frosts.

Fruit Protection

Birds can be just as keen to eat your strawberries as you are. The plants can be covered with light netting secured over the fruiting plants, or you may prefer to invest in a fruit cage. To prevent the strawberries coming in contact with the soil, straw or another protective covering can be laid along the ground under the plants when the first trusses are formed.

Pests and Disease

Strawberry plants can be damaged by slugs, capsids, aphids, red spider mite, leather jackets and wireworm. Some varieties can be prone to powdery mildew and botrytis. Verticillium wilt, Crown rot, Red core are all soil borne diseases, but by buying from our Ministry Certified stocks, you will not be importing these onto your ground. Occasionally these can already be in your soil, which is why it is best to grow strawberry plants on clean ground, particularly where old diseased plants have been recently removed.

Feeding and Watering

Whilst establishing (three weeks or so) the plants could benefit from some extra watering, especially if there hasn't been much rainfall. After this, and under the normal conditions that the British summer offers, further watering should not be needed, perhaps until fruiting time when some extra water may again be beneficial.

It is best to spread well-rotted compost around the plants in the spring, or if you prefer to feed, use a medium phosphate high potash fertiliser. We don't recommend too much nitrogen as this can sometimes create more problems than it can solve. Seaweed liquid fertiliser sprays, garlic sprays and compost tea are all beneficial.