

# NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

January 22, 2024

## Growing Strawberries 101

Strawberries. Most of us enjoy eating them but have not tried growing them. Strawberries are an easy to grow crop by following some essential guidelines to assure success.

Just like vegetable crops, basic site condition requirements for strawberries are sunlight and soils with good drainage. To reduce disease potential, choose sites where strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries did not grow previously. Also try to avoid garden areas where crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant, or vine crops like cucumbers or watermelon were growing.

Healthy strawberry plants grow vigorously and produce modified stems called stolons, better known as runners, which creep along the soil surface. These allow plants to readily spread. Stolons produce daughter plants, which are new plants identical to the parent. Strawberries also have shallow roots so watering during dry weather is necessary.

There are three types of strawberries available. Most popular are June (or spring) bearers, which produce one large crop in late June or early July.

Ever-bearers produce smaller early summer crops but fruit again as summer advances. Day-neutral strawberries fruit continuously all summer but are not hardy here and must be replanted each season. They are ideal for containers.

Managing how plants spread is the main difference in growing systems for strawberries. Matted row systems are most popular for June bearers and require the least amount of work. Plants freely spread within 12-15-inch-wide rows spaced about three feet apart. Hill systems are better for ever-bearers and day-neutral strawberries. Plants are spaced twelve inches apart in 36-inch rows, but runners need to be continually removed to maintain plant spacing.

Proper cultivar selection is essential for success, so do your research before deciding what to grow. Key factors are hardiness for northern Wisconsin winters and resistance to diseases like red stele, a soil borne fungus. Cavendish and Honeoye are examples of hardy June bearers. Ogallala is a hardy ever-bearer with good drought tolerance. Seascape is a popular day-neutral strawberry to consider for containers. These are just a few among many cultivars to consider.

Winter mulch, applied in late fall, is necessary to protect strawberry garden plantings during winter. This is especially important in winters with little snow cover. Finally, the strawberry patch will need renovation periodically to stay productive.

Frigid winter days of January are a suitable time to plan for the upcoming growing season. Strawberries are a great crop to read up on and consider growing in 2024!

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?  
Feel free to contact:

**Bruce Spangenberg**  
**Horticulture Educator**  
**Extension Iron County**  
300 Taconite Street, Suite 118  
Hurley, WI 54534

Phone: 715-561-2695  
Email: [bruce.spangenberg@wisc.edu](mailto:bruce.spangenberg@wisc.edu)

