

## STRAWBERRIES

No other fruit symbolizes nature's summer bounty like the luscious, red, summer strawberry, enjoyed by millions of North Americans in jams, pies and shortcakes. The bearer of fragrant and flavourful fruit, the strawberry holds a revered place in modern history.

The strawberry was first cultivated in the 1300's by King Charles V of France who ordered 12 000 strawberry plants planted in the Royal Gardens of the Louvre. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century the strawberry had endeared itself to the populations of Western Europe. It was depicted on manuscripts as the symbol of perfect righteousness, noble thought and modesty. Our modern berry descends from a cross between the Chilean and Virginia varieties.

### LOCATION

Strawberries like lots of sun and a slightly acid, well-drained soil. Add lots of composted animal manure to get the best results. A granular all purpose fertilizer may be applied before planting and again in September. Mulching is always a good idea when growing strawberries. It keeps weeds down so they are not competing for nutrients, keeps the roots cool and protects them against winter damage.

Home gardeners may choose between June-Bearing and Ever-Bearing plants. Ever-Bearing plants produce one crop in spring and one in late summer, however, they are not as productive as those that produce a single crop in June. 25 – 30 plants is a good size for a small family.

### PRODUCTION

A well-managed bed of strawberries can produce fruit for many years, although the most productive season for fruiting usually occurs in the second year. To channel the energy of the plant into the production of berries the following rules should be observed:

- Encourage good leaf growth, as the size of the berry crop will be proportional to the amount of foliage.
- After planting strawberries in the spring, remove all flowers that develop the first season to encourage a bountiful harvest in the second season.
- Prune off all runners, (the means by which the strawberry plant reproduces asexually), UNLESS you wish to encourage the runners to root and form new plants. This can be done by pressing the runners, (which are at least 12" long), into the soil.
- Each year, after the fruit has been harvested, cut off all leaves to a height of 2-3" to encourage a flush of new growth. Clear away all cut and dead leaves to avoid infecting the new growth with disease.

### PLANTING

Keep the roots of your strawberry plantlets moist until you are ready to plant. Planting can be done as soon as the ground can be worked. Dig a hole deep enough for the roots to go straight down. The roots should be slightly fanned out in the and then covered loosely with soil; the crown or growing tip should be at soil level. Commercial growers set their plants 18" apart in rows 3' apart but, for the home gardener, there are several other methods, which better conserve your valuable garden space and time.

Strawberries may be grown in random spacing on a mound of good topsoil mixed with manure or in pruned dumps that look like hills in your garden. Strawberry tubs or jars will hold numerous plants through the system of pockets or holes in the sides of the containers. The tubs usually have an irrigation system for water and fertilizer provided. Plants in the tiered garden will dry out faster and are more susceptible to freezing.

### WATERING

Water during dry periods. Wet the soil to a depth of about 6" and let it dry out fairly well before watering again.

The veteran strawberry grower can tell by the sweet fragrance in the air that picking time is just around the corner. Once ripening has begun, the process is rapid. They won't stay fresh for long, so be prepared to cook or freeze them soon or nibble them as is.