

Young Strawberry Care

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

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With home gardening for food production on the rise, strawberries are one of the easiest fruits to grow. If you planted June-bearing strawberry plants this spring, be sure to pinch off all blossoms that develop this year.

Blooming and fruit production uses a lot of a plants energy in the form of carbohydrates and sugars produced during photosynthesis. New plants have a limited amount of stored energy and undeveloped roots.

If blossoms are not removed, energy that needs to go to root and runner development the first year is used to develop fruit instead. Young plants allowed to produce fruit will eventually produce runners, but these runners will not be strong enough to produce a good crop of berries next year.

For the plant population needed for a good crop next year, early runner development is needed. Early runners formed this year will produce far more strawberries than runners that form later this season.

Along with weed control and correct watering, be sure to pinch blossoms off of newly planted June-bearing strawberries.

I refer to June-bearing strawberries because this is one of three types of strawberries. The other two are everbearing and day neutral. While early blossoms should be picked off of these too, they could be allowed to produce berries later in the season.

Of the three types of strawberries, June-bearers are the best to grow in Nebraska as they produce the largest fruit and greatest overall yield. June-bearing strawberries produce a single crop during late May and June. Plants come into full production the year after planting and usually out yield everbearing types.

For Nebraska, some early fruiting June-bearing cultivars include Earliglow and Early Red; mid-season cultivars are Chandler, Honeoye, Jewel, Surecrop, Dunlap, Red Chief, and Guardian; and later June-bearing cultivars include Robinson, Sparkle, and Bounty.

Ever-bearing strawberries do not bear fruit all summer as the name suggests. They produce two small crops. One in June and a second in late summer. High temperatures and moisture stress often reduce yield and quality of the second crop of everbearing cultivars such as Ogallala and Ft. Laramie.

Day neutral strawberries have the potential to produce fruit throughout the growing season; however, they stop flower bud initiation when temperatures are above 85 degrees Fahrenheit. As this occurs often in Nebraska, day neutral cultivars like Tristar and Tribute are not the best choice for our area.

You will have good success with strawberries if the location they are planted in is in full sun and the soil is well drained. If you are still preparing to plant, incorporate some compost into the soil prior to planting to increase organic matter and improve drainage.

Because strawberries are perennial broadleaf plants, there are few herbicides that will selectively control weeds without harming strawberries. For weed control, use a two inch layer of mulch and hand weed or carefully hoe as needed.

Strawberries need a uniformly moist soil but will not tolerate wet roots. This is why a well-drained soil is important. When watering, avoid keep the soil wet or saturated but don't allow the soil to dry out too much between irrigation.

Sources: Ward Upham, K-State and Sarah Browning, UNL

