

Hints on growing big, juicy strawberries

Some handy tips for growing lovely fruit in Canberra

Popular Varieties

Tioga – This is an early variety with picking often starting in October. The early flowering can be affected by late frosts. Not the ideal variety for the lower areas of Canberra and district where the frosts are ore severe and stay longer in the day. It has good size berries with firm attractive fruit.

Red Gauntlet – Possibly the most popular variety for all areas. Picking starts in mid-November.

Cambridge Favourite – An older early variety of fair quality that is still grown and offered for sale. The same risk of frost damage to early flowers as 'Tioga'.

Choose 'virus-free' well-rooted runners grown under Government supervision from your local garden centre, labelled with the government approval number and grower. Preferably **not** from well meaning friends, whose plants may have been in for a number of years, and could have strawberry virus. This will affect the quality and quantity of the fruit. **Re-plant fresh plants** every few years in a different part of the garden.

Soil The soil should be slightly acid. In preparation for the bed add plenty of organic matter. This may be old rotted cow manure or composted leaves, mixed with shredded lucerne and a handful of blood-and-bone fertilizer to each square metre.

Planting preparation Mound the soil up to form a ridge about 500 mm wide, flattened on the top. Form a series of short ridges parallel to each other about two metres long. This will depend on the number of strawberries you intend to plant. Allow about half a metre between the ridges. Firm the soil on the ridge and cover with black plastic stretched tight and buried at the edges.

Planting Space the plants about 15-20cm apart in a single row down the centre of each ridge. Cut a cross in the plastic 10 cm across by each plant. Then with a flat bladed knife laid across the roots, push them down into the soil. The crown of the plant must be level with the surface. If planted too deep they will rot; too shallow with the roots exposed they will quickly dry out.

Mulching Alleys between the ridges must be kept weed free. This can be mulched with lucerne hay which is excellent with its high nitrogen content, conserving moisture and keeping fruit clean.

Feeding Feed initially with *Maxicrop Seaweed Plant Nutrient* to encourage strong root growth. When the first flowers appear feed with a high potassium plant nutrient to encourage flowers and subsequently more fruit. *Phostrogen* is ideal, available from all good garden centres.

Pests and Diseases Snails are the biggest pest and can be eliminated with Multicrop's 'Multiguard' Slug and Snail Killer. Apply only a couple of pellets for each plant. Mildew and small insects can be controlled with Yates 'Rose Shield'.

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