

Strawberries

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Strawberries are small, evergreen plants in the rose family. Although strawberries are a perennial crop, in Texas, they are commonly grown as annuals. They grow best with temperatures around 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Depending on the variety, strawberries can yield 0.75 to 1.25 pounds of fruit per plant.

Grow it

Varieties

- There are three types of strawberry varieties categorized based on their flowering response to day-length. These are June-bearing (or short-day), ever-bearing (or long-day), and day-neutral.
- Flowering decreases under high temperatures, so it is important to plant June-bearing or day-neutral varieties in the fall. Plants will establish during the fall and produce fruit in the spring before temperatures become too hot.
- **June-bearing varieties:** Chandler, Festival, and Radiance have done well. Allstar, Surecrop, Cardinal, and Sequoia may also be found at local nurseries.
- **Day-neutral varieties:** Seascape, Albion, and San Andreas.

Soil Preparation

- Strawberries need well-drained soils. Drainage can be improved by planting strawberries on beds raised 6 to 12 inches.
- Mulching with compost can help plants establish, control weeds, and retain soil moisture.

Planting

- Purchase healthy transplants or bare-root plants from a reputable nursery. When purchasing bare-root plants, keep the roots moist.
- Strawberries are best transplanted in the fall, generally between mid-September and late October.
- Space plants 12 inches apart.
- Plant deep enough to cover all roots, but avoid covering the plant's "crown" or growing point.
- After planting, pack the soil firmly around the crown and water it in.

Fertilizing

- Strawberries are heavy feeders. Before transplanting, fertilize with 1.6 ounces of a complete fertilizer, such as 15-5-10, for every 10 square feet of garden area. Ideally, use a slow-release fertilizer, like Osmocote, and incorporate it into the soil before planting.
- Additionally, fertilize plants once a month with a water-soluble fertilizer.

Watering

- Strawberries have shallow root systems and require frequent watering. Keep the soil moisture uniform throughout the growing season—not too wet or too dry. Wet and dry cycles can lead to poor quality and misshapen berries.

Care During the Season

- During early growth, runners should be removed to increase yields. Runners are stems that strawberry plants use to reproduce and will generally form new plantlets, which will root on exposed soil.
- Fall-transplanted strawberries are tolerant of freezing temperatures and only need to be protected with hay or row cover when temperatures drop into the teens.
- It is important to control weeds by hand-weeding around plants.

Insects & Diseases

- Strawberries may have problems with insect pests or root and fruit diseases. Monitor plants for chewing damage, discoloration, mold growth on leaves and fruit, and overall stunted growth.
- To reduce disease potential, plant in well-drained soils, water properly, and increase air movement around plants.
- Birds may also become pests to strawberries. Use bird netting to cover plants and prevent fruit damage.
- For more information, contact your county Extension agent.

Harvesting

- Peak harvest for fall-planted strawberries is March to early May.
- Harvest berries once they are fully ripe because they will not ripen once picked. Be careful not to bruise berries, as this increases berry rot.



Sun:
Full



Soil:
Well-drained



Planting:
Fall



Harvest:
March-
Early May



Life Cycle:
Annual



Buy it

- Choose strawberries that have an even, bright-red color, a fresh aroma, and an intact, healthy green cap.
- Avoid strawberries that are poorly colored, with large white or green areas, are mushy, damaged, leaking juice, shriveled or moldy, or have dry, brown caps.

Store it

- Store whole, unwashed strawberries in the refrigerator, leaving the green tops on. Before storing and during storage, remove any crushed or spoiled berries. Spoiled berries will show signs of mold or slime.
- To extend storage time, wash and freeze strawberries.

Use it

Strawberry Basil Lemonade

Course: Drink

Serves: 16 ¾-cup servings

Ingredients:

Strawberry Basil Puree

- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves
- 1 cup strawberries
- ½ cup water

Lemonade

- 2½ cups lemon juice
- 7½ cups water
- ¼ cup stevia sugar substitute

Instructions:

Strawberry Basil Puree

Wash the strawberries and basil under cold, running water.

Remove green stems from the strawberries and slice in half. Remove the basil leaves from the stem.

Place the halved strawberries and basil leaves in a food processor, and add ½ cup of water. Blend until the mixture is smooth.

Pour into a small bowl and store in the refrigerator for at least an hour, or up to 3 days.

Lemonade

Pour strawberry basil puree through a mesh strainer over a bowl. Use the back of a spoon to press the puree through the strainer to drain the liquid.

Pour the strained puree into a 2-quart pitcher. Add lemon juice, 7½ cups of water, and stevia, and stir until well combined.

Place in the refrigerator to chill until serving, or serve over ice.



Strawberry Banana Shortcake

Course: Dessert

Serves: 12

Ingredients:

Angel Food Cake

- ½ cup egg whites
- 1 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 cup flour

Strawberry Banana Topping

- 1 pound strawberries, sliced
- 3 bananas, sliced
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 4 oz. light whipped cream

Instructions:

Angel Food Cake

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

In a large bowl, beat egg whites until they are foamy (not stiff).

Add cream of tartar and beat until stiff.

Gradually beat in sugar, adding ½ cup of sugar at a time. Beat until smoothly combined.

Mix in vanilla and salt, and then gently fold in the flour.

Pour the cake mixture into an angel food tubular pan.*

Bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes, or until the top is nicely browned. After baking, allow to cool.

Strawberry Banana Topping

Add sliced strawberries and bananas to a bowl. Mix with lemon juice.

Add fruit to the top of the cooled angel food cake.

Top with a dollop of whipped cream. Enjoy!

*Tip: For easy cake pan removal, try using parchment paper in the bottom of the pan and greasing the sides well with butter or cooking spray.



Learn about it

Despite oranges receiving fame for their vitamin C content, strawberries actually have more vitamin C than oranges! One cup of sliced strawberries provides 108 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin C. Strawberries are also a great source of fiber, manganese, folate, and copper. Additionally, they are a good source of many other minerals, nutrients, and antioxidants, including iron, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, and vitamins B, E, and K.¹

¹Retrieved from: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/2346409/nutrients>