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Growing Strawberries in Texas: A Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, and Harvesting

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Why Grow Strawberries?

Strawberries are among the most popular fruits in the United States and can be grown successfully in many parts of Texas with proper planning and care. In addition to producing delicious fruit, strawberry plants require relatively little space and can be grown in gardens, raised beds, containers, and vertical planting systems.

Growing strawberries in Texas is different from growing them in cooler regions of the country. Although strawberries are perennial plants, Texas gardeners should grow them as annuals because high summer temperatures can reduce plant vigor, increase disease pressure, and shorten the productive life of a plant. Strawberries are planted in the fall, grown throughout the winter, and produce fruit in the spring before the arrival of intense summer heat.

With proper variety selection and care, homeowners can enjoy homegrown berries for fresh eating, desserts, preserves, and freezing. Understanding Texas-specific growing conditions is the first step toward a successful harvest.

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Texas Strawberry Growing at a Glance

- **Plant**: Fall
- **Grow**: Fall through spring
- **Harvest**: Spring

Know Your Strawberry Plant

Strawberry plants are small evergreen members of the rose family. Each plant consists of a crown, roots, leaves, flowers, fruit, and runners. The crown is the central growing point of the plant and is critical for healthy growth and fruit production. Under ideal conditions, a single plant can be expected to produce 1 lb of berries.

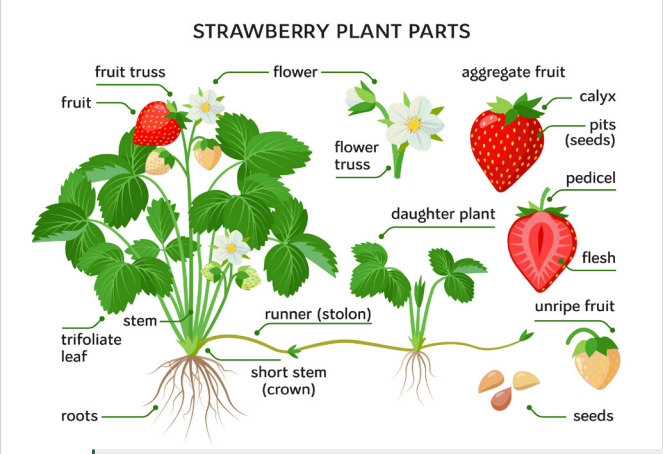

Figure 1. Parts of a strawberry plant.

Strawberry varieties are grouped according to how and when they produce fruit:

- **June-bearing (short-day)** varieties produce one large harvest during the spring and are popular for gardeners who want higher yields over a short period.
- **Day-neutral** varieties are less dependent on day length and can produce fruit over a longer period when temperatures are favorable.
- **Everbearing (long-day)** varieties typically produce two smaller harvest periods, one in spring and another later in the growing season. **These are not adapted for the majority of Texas and should be avoided.**

Choosing the right type depends on your gardening goals, available space, and local climate.

Choosing Strawberry Varieties for Texas

Variety selection is one of the most important decisions a gardener can make. A strawberry variety that performs well in one region of Texas may struggle in another because of differences in temperature, humidity, rainfall, and soil conditions.

Several varieties have performed well under Texas conditions. Short-day cultivars to consider include **Camarosa**, **Chandler**, and **Radiance**, **Ruby June**, and **Fronteras**. Popular day-neutral varieties include **Albion**, **Seascape**, **San Andreas**, **Cabrillo**, **Monterey**, **and Sweet Ann**. Each variety differs in fruit size, flavor, productivity, disease tolerance, and heat tolerance.

Short-Day Varieties

Camarosa – Produces large, firm fruit with excellent shipping quality and good shelf life. Plants are vigorous and productive, making it a widely grown commercial cultivar. Fruit is typically bright red with good flavor, especially under cool growing conditions.

Chandler – Known for outstanding flavor and attractive, large berries. Chandler is highly productive and remains a popular choice for both commercial growers and home gardeners where quality and taste are priorities. Fruit tends to be softer than newer shipping cultivars.

Fronteras – A newer California-developed short-day cultivar selected for high yield potential, attractive fruit shape, firmness, and good adaptation to commercial plasticulture production systems. It has gained attention for strong plant vigor and marketable fruit quality.

Radiance (Florida Radiance®) – Released by the University of Florida. Produces large, attractive berries with excellent early-season yields. The fruit is known for its uniform shape, bright color, and good flavor. Plants are vigorous and have been widely adopted in the southeastern United States.

Ruby June – A University of California cultivar developed for winter and spring production. Produces firm, flavorful fruit with an attractive appearance and strong yields. Berries maintain good size throughout the season and perform well under plasticulture systems.

Day-Neutral Varieties

Albion – One of the most widely grown day-neutral cultivars. Produces large, very firm, conical berries with excellent sweetness and flavor. Noted for extended harvest periods and resistance to several important diseases, including Verticillium wilt and Phytophthora crown rot.

Cabrillo – A University of California release known for exceptionally high yield potential. Produces large, firm fruit with good flavor and attractive appearance. Often regarded as a high-performing cultivar for fresh-market production.

Monterey – Produces large, firm berries with excellent flavor and strong yields throughout the growing season. Plants are vigorous and typically yield more than Albion under favorable conditions. Well suited to shipping and fresh-market sales.

San Andreas – Offers high yields of large, firm fruit with consistent shape and color. Fruit quality is maintained well through warm weather, making it a reliable cultivar for extended harvest periods.

Seascape – Produces large, attractive berries with good flavor over a long harvest season. A dependable day-neutral cultivar that performs well for home gardens and local market production. Known for adaptation across a wide range of environments.

Sweet Ann – Developed by the University of California and valued primarily for excellent flavor and sweetness. Produces large, attractive berries and performs well in direct-market and U-pick operations where eating quality is a major consideration.



Check with your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office or reputable nurseries for the varieties best suited to your area. Starting with well-adapted varieties greatly increases the likelihood of a successful strawberry harvest. Finding the best varieties can sometimes be a challenge. Variety evaluations across many seasons and sites suggest that the key to success is time of planting, i.e., in the fall. If you can't locate the desired variety, plant those which are available. When well cared for and planted at the appropriate time, many varieties will yield well for home growers.

Bareroot vs. Plugs vs. Transplants

Strawberry plants are commonly sold as **bareroot plants or plugs**. Both can be successfully transplanted into the garden.

Bareroot plants are dormant strawberry plants sold without soil around their roots. They are generally less expensive, but the roots can be more difficult to handle and must be kept moist and protected from drying out. Bareroot plants should be planted promptly after they are received.

Plugs are young strawberry plants that have been rooted and grown in a small number of growing media. The root system remains intact in the media, making plugs easier to

handle and transplant than bareroot plants. Plugs are typically more uniform in size and can be established quickly after planting.

Transplant refers to the process of moving a plant into its permanent growing location, rather than a specific type of strawberry plant. Both bareroot plants and plugs are transplanted into the garden.

When to Plant Strawberries in Texas

Timing is one of the most important factors in successful strawberry production. Strawberries should be planted in the fall. Fall planting allows plants to develop strong root systems and crowns before producing flowers and fruit in spring. Texas gardeners who wait until spring to plant often experience reduced yields and delayed production. Runners and flowers/fruit should be removed from the plants in the fall in order to produce a large plant/crown for better spring production.

Planting dates vary by region and weather conditions, but most homeowners should plant between September and November. Choose healthy, disease-free plants from reputable nurseries whenever possible.

Table 1. Planting times in Texas

Texas Region	Typical Planting Time
North Texas	September-October
Central Texas	October
Gulf Coast	October-November
South Texas	October-November
West Texas	September-October

Contact your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office for region-specific recommendations.

Choosing the Right Growing Site

Strawberries perform best in locations that receive at least 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight daily. Full sun promotes flowering, fruit development, and good air circulation.

Good drainage is essential. Strawberry plants do not tolerate standing water or poorly drained soil for extended periods. Areas that remain wet after rainfall can increase the risk of root diseases and plant decline. Raised beds may be beneficial where drainage is a concern.

Proper spacing and airflow also help reduce disease problems. Avoid overcrowding plants and choose a location where foliage can dry quickly after rain or irrigation.

Preparing the Soil

Healthy soil is the foundation of productive strawberry planting. Strawberries grow best in well-drained soils rich in organic matter. Before planting, homeowners should submit a soil sample for analysis through Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory. Soil testing helps identify nutrient deficiencies and prevents unnecessary fertilizer applications.

Incorporate compost or other organic materials when needed to improve soil structure and water-holding capacity. However, more compost is not always better. Excessive organic matter or fertilizer applications can lead to nutrient imbalances and excessive vegetative growth. Follow soil test recommendations whenever possible.

Growing Strawberries In-Ground

Strawberries can be grown successfully in traditional garden beds if the site has adequate drainage and sunlight. Plants are typically spaced about 12 inches apart to provide room for growth and air movement.

When planting, position the crown at soil level. Planting too deeply may cause crown rot, while planting too shallowly can expose roots and reduce establishment. Firm the soil around the roots and water thoroughly after planting. Bareroot plants should be planted so that roots grow directly downwards, not at a slant. Slanted roots will cause stunted plants.

Apply mulch such as clean straw or pine straw around plants. Mulch helps conserve moisture, suppress weeds, reduce soil splash, and keep developing fruit clean.

Growing Strawberries in Raised Beds

Raised beds are one of the easiest ways for homeowners to improve growing conditions for strawberries. Elevated beds provide better drainage, improved soil management, and easier access for planting and harvesting.

A raised bed should have a **target depth of 18 inches** to support healthy root growth and be wide enough to allow comfortable access from both sides. Use quality soil amended with organic matter and avoid compacting the growing area.

Drip irrigation or soaker hoses work particulalry well in raised beds because they deliver water directly to the root zone while keeping foliage dry.



Growing Strawberries in Containers

Container gardening allows homeowners with limited space to grow strawberries on patios, balconies, and decks. Choose containers with drainage holes and enough volume to support root growth throughout the growing season.

Use a high-quality potting mix rather than garden soil. Potting media provides better drainage and aeration while reducing the risk of soil-borne diseases. Container-grown plants often require more frequent watering and fertilization because the growing media dries out faster than landscape soil. To fertilize, use pelleted slow-release fertilizers. Plants should be spaced at least 12 inches apart in containers.

In Texas, monitor container-grown strawberries carefully during warm weather. Excessive heat is a potential challenge of container production because the growing media and root systems can become significantly warmer than those in the ground, resulting in root stress and reduced plant performance. Dark-colored containers can absorb more heat and may increase the risk, particularly when exposed to direct afternoon sun. Larger containers can help buffer temperature fluctuations, while providing afternoon shade during periods

of extreme heat can help reduce heat stress and protect the root system.

Vertical Strawberry Systems

Vertical growing systems such as strawberry towers, stackable planters, pocket planters, and wall-mounted containers can maximize production in small spaces. These systems are attractive options for homeowners who have limited garden space or who want strawberries close to outdoor living areas.

While vertical systems save space, they typically require more intensive management than in-ground or raised-bed plantings. Water may distribute unevenly throughout the structure, and plants often dry out more quickly. In addition, **root temperatures can become elevated during hot Texas weather**.

For best results, monitor moisture frequently, provide adequate fertility, and select a location that receives sufficient sunlight while minimizing excessive afternoon heat. Vertical systems can be productive and attractive, but they require greater attention to watering and maintenance. Such systems should ideally be watered daily with a diluted nutrient solution.

Watering Strawberries

Strawberries have shallow root systems and require consistent soil moisture throughout the growing season. Avoid allowing soil to become excessively dry or saturated, as fluctuating moisture levels can reduce fruit quality and yield.

Drip irrigation is generally the preferred watering method because it delivers water directly to the root zone while keeping foliage dry. Soaker hoses also work well. Overhead irrigation should be minimized whenever possible because wet leaves and fruit can encourage disease development. If overhead irrigation is used, try to apply the water early in the day so the foliage is dry going into the night.

Plants with signs of excessive or not enough moisture may wilt, have small berries, show poor growth, and have yellowing leaves.

Fertilizing Strawberries

Soil testing should guide fertility decisions whenever possible. Before planting, incorporate fertilizer according to soil test recommendations and avoid excessive nitrogen applications. Too much nitrogen can encourage leaf growth at the expense of fruit production.

Container-grown strawberries may require more frequent fertilization because nutrients are leached from the growing media through repeated watering. Monitor plant growth and follow label directions for all fertilizer products.

Tip: If plants produce lots of leaves but few berries, excess nitrogen may be contributing to the problem. Avoid applying additional nitrogen unless a soil test or plant symptoms indicate it is needed.

Iron deficiency: Interveinal chlorosis can occur when strawberries are grown in high-pH soils. Affected leaves develop yellow tissue between the veins while the veins remain green. In high-pH soils, iron may be present but unavailable to plants. **EDDHA iron chelate is one of the most effective forms of iron for correcting**

iron deficiency when applied to the soil because it remains available at higher soil pH. However, EDDHA products can be difficult to find in small, homeowner-sized packages.

When selecting an iron product for soil application, **do not rely on EDTA- or DTPA-chelated iron to correct iron deficiency in high-pH soils**. These forms are less stable as soil pH increases and may not provide an effective long-term correction. If EDDHA is not available, a **foliar iron application** may be an alternative. Foliar applications can provide a temporary correction by delivering iron directly to the leaves, but they may need to be repeated as new growth develops. Always follow the product label for application rates and directions.

Pollination and Fruit Development

Pollination is essential for developing large, well-shaped berries. Poor pollination can result in misshapen fruit or reduced yields. Bees and other pollinators help move pollen among flowers and contribute to successful fruit development.

Encourage pollinator activity by avoiding unnecessary insecticide applications during bloom and by following all pesticide label directions.

Common Strawberry Pests in Texas

Several insects and arthropod pests may affect strawberries in Texas. Common pests include aphids, spider mites, thrips, pill bugs, slugs, snails, and sap-feeding insects. Regular scouting allows homeowners to identify issues before significant damage occurs.



Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines monitoring, cultural practices, sanitation, and biological control to reduce pest problems while minimizing pesticide use. Maintaining healthy plants is the first line of defense against many pests.

For help identifying strawberry pests or determining the most appropriate control options, **contact your local County Extension Agent for recommendations specific to your area and growing conditions.**

Common Strawberry Diseases

Disease problems are often encouraged by poor air circulation, excessive moisture, and contaminated planting materials. Common strawberry diseases include gray mold, anthracnose, powdery mildew, leaf spot diseases, and root rots.

Many disease issues can be prevented through selecting disease resistant varieties, proper spacing, good drainage, mulching, sanitation, and avoidance of unnecessary overhead irrigation. Remove severely affected plant material to reduce disease spread.

Freeze Protection

Strawberry plants can tolerate a light frost, but a hard freeze may kill foliage if the plants are not acclimated. When temperatures threaten to go below 22 degrees Fahrenheit, you will need to cover them with sheets, frost cloth, or herbicide-free straw. Take your covers off as soon as you can after the freezing temperatures are over. Placing metal frames (hoops) above the strawberry plants can help protect them from being crushed from the covers. Strawberry foliage may freeze at warmer temperatures than 22 degrees Fahrenheit if plants are not acclimated or if a sudden hard freeze occurs. Preserving as much foliage as you can will lead to healthier and more productive plants in the spring.

Open strawberry flowers are only frost-tolerant to 30 degrees Fahrenheit. To protect blooms, consider covering plants if temperatures threaten to dip in the spring.

Wildlife and Other Strawberry Thieves

Humans are not the only creatures that enjoy strawberries. Birds, squirrels, rodents, slugs, and snails may feed on ripening fruit before harvest.

Physical barriers such as bird netting are often the most effective control methods. Harvesting fruit promptly and maintaining a clean growing area can also help reduce losses.

Weed Management

Weeds compete with strawberries for water, nutrients, and sunlight. The shallow root systems of strawberries make weed control especially important during establishment.

Mulch, hand-pulling, and proper plant spacing can reduce weed pressure. Care should be taken when cultivating near plants to avoid damaging roots and crowns.

Harvesting Strawberries

Strawberries develop their best flavor when allowed to fully ripen on the plant. Harvest berries when they have developed full color and are firm but ripe, usually indicated by a deep red color.

Gently pick fruit by pinching or cutting the stem above the berry. Frequent harvesting encourages continued production and prevents overripe fruit from attracting pests or developing decay.

Post-Harvest Handling and Storage

Strawberries are highly perishable and should be handled carefully after harvest. Refrigerate berries promptly and avoid washing them until they are ready to use. Remove damaged fruit to help reduce spoilage.

Excess, overripe, or under ripe berries can be frozen, dehydrated, or preserved as jam.

What Happens After Harvest?

One of the most common homeowners' questions is whether strawberry plants can be kept for another season. Although strawberries are perennial plants, many Texas gardeners treat them as annuals because summer heat, disease pressure, and declining productivity can reduce performance.

Depending on your location and growing system, plants may be renovated and maintained or replaced with new transplants in the fall.

Propagating Strawberries from Runners

Strawberries naturally produce runners, which form new plantlets capable of developing into independent plants. Healthy runners can be rooted in soil or containers and later separated from the mother plant.

When maximum fruit production is the goal, excessive runners should be removed, so plants direct more energy toward flowering and fruiting.

Troubleshooting Guide

Table 2. Troubleshooting problems and possible causes

Problem	Possible Cause
Lots of leaves, few berries	Excess nitrogen, poor pollination
Small berries	Water stress, overcrowding
Misshapen berries	Poor pollination, environmental stress
Mushy fruit	Excess moisture, disease
Sudden wilting	Root or crown issues
Brown leaf edges	Water stress, fertilizer salts
Holes in fruit	Insects, slugs, wildlife
Flowers but no fruit	Pollination or weather conditions

Summary

With proper planning and care, strawberries can be a productive and enjoyable addition to Texas home gardens. By selecting varieties adapted to your region, planting during the recommended season, and providing adequate sunlight, water, and nutrition, you can harvest fresh berries right from your backyard. Remember that successful gardening starts with understanding local growing conditions. For additional assistance, contact your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office for research-based recommendations tailored to your area.