

## Garden Bites: the Straight Scoop on Strawberries

The fruit that epitomizes summer, the strawberry, should be grown in all our home gardens. The "cardboard pink fruitoids" (as one author terms the things marketed as strawberries in grocery stores) are those bred to ship well, not necessarily those which are the most flavorful. As home gardeners, we can focus on qualities other than how well a fruit ships!

- Nothing compares well with the *flavor* of freshly-harvested home-grown berries.
- Strawberries are the best small fruit for *western Washington growing conditions*.
- You can harvest your own strawberries from *June until the first fall frost*.
- Strawberries are highly nutritious and also contain *cancer-inhibiting* ellagic acid, but since they absorb more pesticide residue than any other fruit, it pays to grow your own so that you maintain cultural control.
- The eminently edible strawberry plant is also valuable as an *ornamental*.



Be aware that there are different types of strawberries. June-bearers, which produce the largest berries, bear fruit during a limited time in June and July. Everbearers have two crops, one in June and July and one in the fall. Day neutral strawberries produce throughout the summer, as do the tiny but delicious alpins.

It's ironic that the fruit that is grown in so many places in the world has many varieties, each of which is adapted to a certain geographical area and cannot be counted upon to succeed in other areas. Consequently, we gardeners must do our homework to learn which varieties are most likely to thrive in our particular situations. Regional publications such as Washington State University's *Gardening in Western Washington Library*, [Strawberries](#) help by listing varieties by type and usually have additional comments on whether the berry is best for fresh eating, jams, or freezing; whether it has good disease-resistance, etc. Nurseries' websites, such as that of Washington state's [Raintree](#) nursery, often give descriptions of the varieties which they sell. The Oregon State University publication mentioned below indicates whether the June-bearers listed are early, mid- or late-season, useful information if you have space for several varieties and wish to extend the time during which you may harvest the large June bearers.

### How does one get started growing strawberries?

Use a thorough guide such as Washington State University's [Growing Small Fruits for the Home Garden](#), EB1640, or Oregon State University's [Growing Strawberries in Your Home Garden](#), EC 1307. Such publications

include sections on site and variety selection, planting and initial and ongoing care, "novel" growing methods, harvest and pests. June bearers.

## **What are some innovative uses for strawberry plants, especially in limited-space gardening situations?**

Strawberries are among the most ornamental of edibles. Grow day neutral and alpine types in hanging baskets, classic "strawberry pots", barrels, window-boxes, or patio containers, or use them to edge an herb garden or flower bed. See page six of the Virginia Cooperative Extension publication cited below ([Resources](#)) for guidance on growing strawberries in a barrel.

## **What are "alpine" strawberries?**

The alpine strawberry, *Fragaria vesca* (or *Fragaria alpina*), is a cousin of the wild strawberry from which cultivated strawberries were developed. You can start these berries from purchased seed or plants. The leaves are smaller than those of the standard strawberry plant, and the small but flavorful fruit has more pectin than ordinary strawberries.

## **How can you keep strawberries from going "bad" in the refrigerator?**

Ethylene gas released by strawberries (and many other fruits and vegetables) hastens their deterioration. Specially treated green plastic bags (such as **Ever-Fresh** and **PEAKfresh Preserving Bags**) are impregnated with a natural mineral that absorbs ethylene, keeping refrigerated berries in good condition for a longer period.

## **How nutritious are strawberries?**

If you do not have allergic reactions to strawberries, and you can avoid combining them with whipped cream, ice cream, shortcake and such, strawberries are very good for you. Strawberries have, ounce for ounce, a higher combination of antioxidants than any of these popular fruits: plums, oranges, red grapes, bananas, apples, tomatoes, kiwifruit, grapefruit, pears and honeydews. One cup of strawberries (about 4 ounces) has only 50 calories and provides a gram of protein, 12 grams of carbohydrate, 4 grams of fiber, 94 mg of vitamin C (yes, more than most citrus fruit) and no fat.

## **What are some quick ways to prepare and consume strawberries?**

- Eat them out of hand in the garden, or shortly after gathering them from the garden.
- Establish a daily summertime habit of visiting the strawberry patch just before breakfast. If you go out early enough, this trip can serve a second purpose: that of reducing the number of slugs inhabiting your berry patch!
- Use the berries you gather during your early morning visit to prepare a bowl of berries for nibbling or serving with milk or yogurt, with cold or hot cereal, or in a smoothie.
- In a small food processor, combine four ounces of cream cheese with six large strawberries and a tablespoon of chopped candied ginger. Use promptly as a spread for crackers, bagels, or toast.
- Blend a cup of milk, six strawberries and two tablespoons of frozen orange juice concentrate.
- Puree six large strawberries with one-half cup of plain yogurt, a dash of vanilla, and sweetener of your choice – a bit of honey, sugar, or stevia.

For more recipes, visit Oregon State University's food resource page on [fresh strawberries](#) and the [Oregon Strawberry Commission's site](#).

## Resources

The magazine articles listed here are accessible to [Fort Vancouver Regional Library](#) card holders online. From the library's homepage select in turn, **OnLine Databases** and **GO TO DATABASES**; enter your library card number and last name; select **InfoTrac**, the second on the list of "Authorized Links" and then **General Reference Center** (which is a magazine index).

[Growing Small Fruits for the Home Garden](#), EB 1640, Washington State University. <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1640/eb1640.html>.

McCord, Holly. The Fruit Bad Guys Fear Most. *Prevention*, Sept 1996, v48, n9, p56 (1).

Otto, Stella. *The Backyard Berry Book*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 1995.

*Raintree Nursery*, Morton, Washington, (360) 496-6400, "Mignonette" and "Rugen" alpine strawberry plants are available from this nursery.

Sadowski, I.E. Strawberry Fields Forever. *Mother Earth News*, August-Sept 2001, p. 18. (This article focuses on the use of methyl bromide in commercial strawberry culture.)

Shepherd, Renee. The Gardener Cook. *Sunset*, March 2001, v206, i3, p. 102 (about alpiners).

[Strawberries](#). Gardening in Western Washington, Library. Washington State University. <http://gardening.wsu.edu/library/smfr009/smfr009.htm>.

Strik, Bernardine C. [Growing Strawberries in your Home Garden](#). Oregon State University Extension Service, EC1307.

[Superb Herbs: Alpine Strawberry](#)

Taylor, Jeff. The Price of Fresh Strawberries. *Mother Earth News*, April-May 1994, n143, p.30 (4).

Virginia Cooperative Extension. Small Fruit in the Home Garden.