

THE FARMER'S BASKET

May 2011 Newsletter

How do I care for Petunias in a hanging basket?



Don't let your petunia dry out between waterings. They need plenty of water, but keep in mind that the soil in beds and containers must be well drained and containers dry out faster than in ground beds. If possible, water your plants in the morning so the foliage dries before evening.

Petunias are "heavy feeders." The full potential of petunias will not be realized from hungry plants. Apply a liquid fertilizer every 10 to 14 days or use a combination of liquid and slow release fertilizer. Always follow the recommendations shown on the labels.

Strawberries

Strawberries are one of the most rewarding food crops to grow in a small home garden.

While most fruit trees take several years to begin bearing, you can harvest your own strawberries the very first summer.



1. DECIDE WHERE TO GROW YOUR STRAWBERRIES

Get them some sun on the balcony, rooftop, patio or doorstep.

If your horizontal space is limited, consider growing strawberries in a hanging basket or stacked planter, which will allow you to take advantage of vertical growing space as the strawberry plants tumble out over the sides. By home-growing your own berries, you will also be helping the environment, since commercially grown strawberries use wasteful amounts of water, chemical fertilizers, and some of the worst pesticides imaginable, not to mention the

environmental cost of shipping them for hundreds or thousands of miles.

A sunny spot outside your home is the best place to grow strawberries, though you can get a partial crop with less than a half day of direct sunlight.

2. CHOOSE A CONTAINER FOR THEM

Give your plants enough room to grow.

Whether you choose a container made of clay, plastic, wood, or other material, make sure it has a **soil depth of at least 12-14 inches** to give the plants' root systems space to grow. How many

plants you can fit in will depend upon the width of the container, since you should space plants about 10-12 inches apart to allow them to spread horizontally.

Strawberries like deep, loamy soil that drains well. This means that it should contain plenty of organic matter (such as compost, shredded bark or peat moss) as well as some sand or grit. The potting soil mixes sold at The Farmer's Basket will be sufficient, and if you have access to compost, sprinkle an inch or so on top. Be sure the container has drainage holes in the bottom. In general, strawberries like plenty of nitrogen plus balanced amounts of the other major nutrients. A 10-10-10 fertilizer is not excessive, especially since organic fertilizers have a slower release time.

3. GET YOUR STRAWBERRY PLANTS

Want your strawberries this year, or can you wait?

Your next step is to find some plants and put them in the soil. There are two main kinds of strawberries available: "June-bearing" plants that will bear in spring or early summer, and "Everbearing" or day-neutral varieties that can bear from early summer right up until your first frost. While June-bearing varieties can take a year to establish (you normally plant them now for next year's harvest), everbearing plants can give you fruit the very first year and may allow you to extend your harvest over a period of weeks or months. There are many great varieties of strawberries out there.

4. CARE FOR YOUR PLANTS AND ENJOY

For optimum production, keep your strawberry plants well watered throughout the growing season. Plants should continue to be productive for at least 2-3 years, but will need to be replaced thereafter. To renovate June-bearing plants for next year, trim off their old leaves, making sure not to damage the center stalk (crown) of the plant. Everbearers do not need this trimming, but all plants should be given some top-dressed fertilizer again after fruiting. I wish you the best of success in growing your own berries!

8 Common Gardening Mistakes

- 1) Drowning or under watering plants
- 2) Picking the wrong plants
- 3) Overlooking the soil
- 4) Taking on too much

5) Crowding plants - Nobody ever believes their plants will grow to the size on the labels, yet they often grow even larger than that. Always consider the plant's mature size to ensure you've allowed enough space. When plants are too close together, they lack air circulation and suffer more pest and disease problems.

Overcrowding plants becomes an especially expensive mistake when you've planted costly trees and shrubs too close to your house or other buildings, underneath power lines, or in other spots where they eventually need to be removed. Before you plant that cute little 3-foot-tall tree next to your garage, look at the space around and above it and picture what it will look like when it's 40 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Will it encounter any obstacles at its mature size?

6) Ignoring light requirements - Without the correct amount of light, plants won't reach their full potential. If you plant your sun-loving vegetable plants in shade, they won't give you much of a yield- and shade plants will turn brown with too much sun.

To determine how much sun you have in a specific spot, watch carefully throughout the day to see precisely what time the sun first reaches that spot and what time the evening shade falls. Then calculate the difference between those times. Partial shade means three to six hours of light; full sun means at least six.

Light changes over time, too. That sunny spot in winter under a deciduous tree will become shady when the leaves grow again. Remember that plants cast shade on other plants, too. And there's a difference between dense shade (such as that under a low, thick leaf canopy) and light shade (such as that under a high, thin leaf canopy), so look for plants that prefer the type of shade you have.

7) Spending without a plan

8) Forgetting to maintain

Follow our upcoming newsletters for more in depth information on the remaining mistakes.