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STRAWBERRY CULTURE

Agricultural Experiment Station
South Dakota State College
Brookings, South Dakota

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Strawberry Culture

-S. A. McCrory-

The strawberry succeeds under a great variety of soil and climatic conditions. Being a short season crop, it fits well into South Dakota conditions. The plant is a shallow feeder, the roots rarely penetrating the soil to a depth of more than eight inches or extending beyond the spread of the leaves. The plants are unusually hardy and rarely require spraying to control disease and insects. As it is the first fresh fruit to appear on the early spring making it always in demand. Its spritely flavor and attractive appearance make it not only the most sought but most beautiful fruit grown.

The strawberry has a wide range of adaptation to varied conditions of soil and climate. In general, it will thrive upon any soil suited to the production of field crops. For best results, a well-drained, fairly light, moisture holding medium fertile soil is most desirable. New land, or land that has been in cultivation only a few years will more nearly meet the requirements than land that has been under cultivation for many years. The preparation of the soil should start in the fall by plowing the land and leaving it rough until spring.

Plants should be set in the spring as soon as the ground is in a workable condition. They are not sensitive to frost except at the blooming period. Fall planting may be done but few or no plants will be produced from such plantings. The plants should be spaced from 12 to 18 inches apart in rows 4 feet apart. The everbearing types do not normally make as many plants as the June bearing type and would therefore be planted closer together. An ideal plant for transplanting will be one-year old and have long, fibrous white roots. They should be planted so that the crown of the plant is exactly level with the surface of the soil. If the crown is higher than the ground level, the roots will be exposed and will dry out,

If planted too deeply the crown will be covered by cultivation and rain and give a stunted effect. Cultivation should be such as will best retain the moisture and prevent weeds or grass from forming in the rows. A cultivator containing a number of small teeth to run between the rows serves this purpose well. As soon as the plants have started runners the direction of cultivation should not change so that runners will have a chance to set plants. Moist soil is essential to the establishment of new plants and if a dusty or dry soil is the only thing with which they can come in contact, few plants will be set and the yield the following spring will be materially reduced. Too much cultivation may be given to plants and so disturb the runners that they cannot attach themselves.

For the June bearing type of strawberries, Premier and Dunlap are well adapted to conditions of this state. Premier is an early variety and a good plant-maker. Dunlap is recognized as one of the best plantmakers grown. Since this is one of the greatest difficulties in starting strawberries in South Dakota, this variety is most frequently grown. Also Minnesota 1192 (now named Burgandy) and Pathfinder have good performance records at Brookings. A planting of Premier or Dunlap, Pathfinder and Burgandy will give a long season. For the ever-bearing type Gem, Mastodon, and Progressive still remain at the top of the list. Since the everbearing type of fruit has such a long fruiting period, they do not make many plants under normal conditions in South Dakota. If one grows this type of berry, he may expect to sacrifice something in the way of yield.

By September the row should be covered completely with plants and be 18 inches wide, giving a matted row effect, with a small alley between rows. Winter protection is essential to both the plant and fruit crop. This protection should be a mulch of straw or leaves. If applied before the plant has gone into a dormant condition, much loss may result from smothering. If the mulch is neglected until ~~a~~ severe winter comes, loss may be suffered because

of lack of protection. A guide which some growers use to determine the time of applying the mulch is to wait until the ground freezes to a depth great enough to support a wagon hauling the mulch material. This usually follows a few good heavy frosts. In the spring the mulch, which was 4 to 6 inches thick, may be partially raked from the row toward the alleys or between rows where it remains to serve as a moisture retaining agent. The plants grow up through the remaining straw and the fruit is less likely to be dirty. The covering may also retard development and prevent the early blossoms from being killed by frost.

After the crop is harvested, the mulch material may be removed and as much of the tops of the plants as possible cut off with a scythe. A plow of the single shovel type may be run through the center of the row, tearing out the old plants. This leaves the young plants on the sides of the row which may be worked out with a hoe. The following season the row will be established in the area which was an alley the past season. Some growers may find it more profitable to leave a planting for a two-year period before renovating the rows.

Strawberries are seldom attacked by insects in South Dakota. Leaf spot is the most serious disease. This is especially true during wet seasons and is likely to be worse in old beds. To control leaf spot the plants should be sprayed with a 4-4-50 Bordeaux shortly after growth has started in the spring. A second application should be made as soon as the fruit is well set. If the disease is severe a third application should be made at the end of the harvest.