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Recommended Citation

Ford, A., "Planning the Strawberry Patch" (1922). *Extension Circulars*. Paper 98.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_circ/98

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Extension Circular No. 98
March

South Dakota State College
and United States Department
of Agriculture Cooperating.

PLANNING THE STRAWBERRY PATCH

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GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

You will receive this circular early in March. This is much too early to do any outside work on your strawberry patch. It is not too early, however, to do a lot of valuable planning. In the first place we want you to go into this thing to win. It is going to take a lot of hard work and some worry, but we believe you are made of the right stuff to win or you would not have enrolled in this club. As a rule only winners are found in boys and girls club work and it is now your duty to uphold the high standard already attained by other South Dakota boys and girls who are already in club work.

The strawberry has been called the most important small fruit in the United States, and this applies equally as well to South Dakota as a state. Strawberries do well on a great variety of soils and under a great many different climatic conditions. A number of varieties have proven to do especially well under South Dakota conditions.

During the past several years many South Dakota strawberry patches have made remarkable yields with only a moderate amount of care. This is proof that strawberries are highly successful under our conditions and it is further proof that our boys and girls can make a success also.

There is very little expense connected with the establishment of a strawberry patch. The plants can be secured locally or from a reliable nursery at reasonable prices. After once establishing a patch, it can be extended from year to year by resetting young plants which rooted from the original plants. In this way a patch can be kept permanently by this yearly renewal.

Since strawberries are highly successful in South Dakota and since they can be established at very little expense, you boys and girls who have enrolled in strawberry clubs, have undertaken a project which is an ideal one. You can grow berries to sell or you can grow berries to can for use in your own home or you can grow plants to sell to your neighbors. If you manage things correctly, this strawberry patch of yours should be a means of making it possible to start a bank account or to increase it if you already have one.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,
W. F. Kumlien, Director. Distributed in furtherance of Acts of
Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

SELECTION OF LOCATION FOR PATCH

The selection of a piece of ground on which strawberries are to be grown is very important. In many cases the difference between success and failure in strawberry growing depends upon the choice of the site for the patch.

Where possible the patch should be placed on ground that is slightly elevated. Ground of this nature has plenty of air and water drainage. This far north where we are constantly in danger of late frosts in the spring, an eastern or northern slope is to be preferred. On such slopes the plants are always held back somewhat in the spring which tends to make them less subject to the late frosts.

The soil does not play as great a part in strawberry culture as with some of the other plants. Strawberries do well on a great variety of soils, in fact one authority has said that any soil capable of producing a good corn crop is excellent for strawberries. It should be well prepared, moderately fertile, well drained and contain a good supply of humus. If the soil should be slightly acid, this need not be corrected as it has been found that berries do well on either sour or sweet soils.

The strawberry is a shallow rooted plant and, therefore, a constant supply of moisture near the surface of the soil is very important. Because of this, the soil upon which the patch is placed should be high in ability to hold moisture. Almost all soils that have a good supply of humus also have considerable ability to hold moisture. In view of this fact, there should be a liberal amount of well rotted manure worked into the ground as this adds humus and raises the water holding ability of the soil. Always remember that the more moisture left in the soil during the hot dry months, the better will be your success with strawberries.

PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

It is always well to put the patch on a piece of ground that has been cultivated for at least the previous year. This soil will always be in good tilth, fairly free from noxious weed seed and insect pests. It is not a good plan to put the patch on land that was sod the previous year because of danger from white grub and cutworm injury. These pests, as a rule, are worse in crops after sod.

The ideal way to prepare soil for strawberries is to apply a heavy covering of barnyard manure in the fall of the year and plow it under. This manure will become well rotted before spring when the ground should again be worked. Since you probably had not planned a patch last fall, of course you have not prepared your ground in this way. In that case, the land should be spaded or plowed fairly deep and a good covering of well rotted manure put on the spaded surface.

This should then be worked in by second shallow spading. Do not spade the manure under deeply because strawberries are mostly surface feeders, so you can see that for best results the plant food also should be fairly near the surface.

Under South Dakota conditions commercial fertilizers should not be considered. Most South Dakota soil has a fairly good supply of plant foods so that all it will be necessary to add is plenty of barnyard manure for humus.

VARIETIES

There are a great many varieties of strawberries, but all fall under one of two heads. They are either perfect or imperfect. By perfect varieties, we mean those varieties having flowers with both pistils and stamens (male and female elements). The imperfect varieties have only the pistils (female element) but not the stamens. Perfect varieties can be planted alone as each blossom is capable of fertilizing itself. The imperfect varieties will not bear fruit when planted alone since these produce no pollen and hence cannot be fertilized. In case it is desirable to grow any one of the imperfect varieties, it is necessary to plant some perfect variety with it to furnish the pollen for fertilization. In this case every fourth or fifth row should be a perfect variety. Any nursery catalog tells which varieties are perfect and which imperfect.

Nursery men now have several hundred different varieties of strawberries catalogued and many of the new kinds are proving to be not much of a success, and because of this we recommend staying by the standard varieties. It is well not to pay a high price for some new variety or hybrid because these new kinds, if good, will soon increase and be offered at reasonable prices. Beginners in strawberry work should use a variety that is of the perfect type to save the trouble of caring for two varieties which may be easily mixed together.

For South Dakota conditions we recommend strongly two varieties. The Progressive Everbearing and Dunlap. Authorities and those who have been growing strawberries in South Dakota for years claim that these two varieties are the best. For boys and girls clubs we feel that one or both of these varieties should be chosen because we know you will have the best success with them. Both of these varieties are perfect so they can be grown alone. The following tells of the advantages and disadvantages of these two varieties, so that you will be better able to choose the one for use in your patch.

Progressive Everbearing

For home use nothing beats the Progressive Everbearing because when properly cared for it ripens fruit over a period of about four months. From one hundred to two hundred plants, if treated right, will furnish enough fresh fruit for the average family and in addition to that, plenty for canning. Everbearing plants are nearly twice as expensive as the Dunlap. This appears at first as a disadvantage, but in reality it is not because the plants you sell from your patch also will be worth more than

Dunlap plants. If the blossoms are kept snipped off Everbearing plants until about the middle of August, a partial crop can be secured the fall after the same spring the plants are set. In case of the Dunlap you cannot expect fruit until the second year and then they will bear only over a period of about three weeks.

Dunlap

If berries are being grown to be marketed, the Dunlap is probably the best variety to use because it gives a very heavy yield during late June and early July. This period of bearing is only over a period of about three weeks. The plants can be secured very cheaply and are absolutely hardy under South Dakota conditions.

For South Dakota conditions we would strongly recommend that strawberry club members use 25 percent Dunlap and 75 percent Progressive Everbearers. These, of course, should not be mixed in planting but should be kept separated in the patch. The reason for using these two varieties in the patch in this proportion is to spread the bearing period of the patch over a longer season. The Dunlaps will give a good picking of berries during late June and early July but, of course, will not bear until the second year. The Everbearers will give a continual light picking of berries during late summer and early fall. The Everbearers also will give fruit the first fall, if handled properly.

HOW TO SECURE PLANTS

Strawberry plants can be secured in one of two ways, locally or from nurseries. Where good strong plants can be obtained from some local grower, and the plants are absolutely true to the variety they are supposed to be, it is probably best for the club member to get his plants in this way because they are cheaper. Never take plants from a patch that has not been successful and never take plants from a patch that is infected with any of the more serious strawberry diseases.

In case no satisfactory plants can be secured locally, of course you will have to send to a nursery for them. Always remember that it is best to do business only with the more reliable nurseries. The larger the order the cheaper the price, is a rule followed by all nurseries. Because of this, orders for plants should be pooled or grouped.

Members of a club who are planning on sending away for plants should give their order to their club leader so that he or she can order all plants for the club in one lot, thus getting the price reduction. The plants should be shipped to a central point and there distributed to the various club members as per their order.

Don't fail to get your order for plants in early. It should by all means be done this month (March). Order them to be shipped so that you will receive them on a certain date, even though that date may be a month or more later.

HOW TO HANDLE PLANTS WHEN RECEIVED

When your plants arrive, it may be too early for setting out in which case you will have to keep your plants for sometime. If this comes to pass, you certainly will want to know how to keep them alive and healthy. As soon as the plants are received, they should be carefully unpacked and immediately heeled-in. To heel-in, spade up some soil and pulverize it finely. Then rake several V-shaped trenches about six inches deep and fairly close together. The plants usually come in compact bundles of twenty-five each, with a label on each bundle designating the variety. The bundles should be opened, the plants separated and spread out in the trenches. Then firm the earth carefully about the roots being careful not to cover the crowns. The variety label placed at the end of each trench prevents the mixing of varieties. If the plants seem to be rather dry when first received, do not dash water on to them. This is the worst thing one can do. If the crowns are soaked with water, they will start to rot in a very short time. It is all right to dip the roots of dry plants in water if the crowns are kept dry, but the best thing to do is to heel them in moist soil immediately.

Next month we will take up the setting and cultivation of the plants in the strawberry bed.
