1-1923

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Recommended Citation
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_circ/107
PICKING, MARKETING AND CANNING OF STRAWBERRIES

by

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Some may believe that strawberry picking is not a subject to be taken up for July, but let us tell you why we are taking it up at this time. Club members who are planting spring bearing varieties will not get a crop until next June, but those who have planted everbearing varieties should get a fair crop this fall if it is not too dry. We are giving the first year members this information now so that they can use it for their everbearing varieties. This information should be filed away carefully so you can turn to it again next spring when your June bearing varieties are ready to pick.

Length of Picking Season

The length of the picking season depends on the variety, the climate, the soil, the age of the plants and the culture of the plants have been given. Under South Dakota conditions the spring bearing varieties bear from three to four weeks, while the everbearing varieties will bear from June to late in October when there is plenty of moisture available for the plants. It is quite often noticed that old beds come into bearing somewhat earlier than new beds of the same variety and hence fruit over a longer period, but do not fruit as heavily.

When Should Strawberries Be Picked?

How ripe the berries should be when picked depends on the variety, weather and distance from market. The soft varieties should be picked somewhat green to avoid spoilage, while the firm varieties may be left to become more nearly ripe on the vines. In cool weather the berries may be left on the vines until quite ripe, while in warm weather they should be picked greener. Berries that are to be immediately used or canned can be left on the vines until fairly ripe. Redness does not always indicate ripeness, furthermore, strawberries increase considerably in size after they begin to turn red. Berries planted in hills or hedge rows usually color up early, while berries in the more shaded matted rows color late. When berries are to be marketed, do not pick any greener than is necessary to get the fruit to market in good condition.

Concerning the question how often should the patch be picked over, we might state the following: For the June bearing varieties, twice a week is often enough to pick in cool weather but in hot weather daily pickings may be necessary. For the everbearing varieties once a week is often enough during the fall as these plant ripen their fruit slowly late in the season. In the early part of the season everbearers will stand more frequent picking. During the height of the bearing season, always give the patch a good picking on Saturday to prevent loss of berries due to over-ripeness over Sunday.
The best time to pick strawberries is in the morning. The reason for this is that the berries last longer if picked when they are cool and firm, and furthermore, early morning picking is easier on the picker. The berries should not be picked too early in the morning when there are dewey nights, because it has been found that berries picked while they are wet "go down" quicker than those picked while dry. It is always safer to wait until the sun has dried off the dew before starting the picking.

How Should Strawberries Be Picked?

Strawberries which are to be marketed in town or even sold to the neighbors should be picked with the stems on. Berries which are snapped off leaving no calyx usually bleed badly and will spoil much sooner than when the calyx is left intact.

The ideal picker leaves a stem about a quarter of an inch in length on the berry.

When berries are to be immediately used for table purposes or for canning, they may be snapped free from the calyx when picked, but this method should never be used where it is desirable to keep the berries for a day or two.

At each picking all nubbins and over-ripe berries should be picked as they are considerable of a drain on the plants if left unpicked. The picker should be provided with an extra box for these culls. For picking purposes a box carrier is a very convenient thing and should be used where the picking is very extensive. It is simply a box on short legs to keep it off the vines. It is furnished with a handle so that it can be easily carried from place to place. One box on this carrier should be used only for the nubbins and over-ripe berries. The berries can be picked directly into this carrier, or better, ordinary strawberry boxes can be placed in the carrier and the berries put into them.
Marketing

During the first year club members will probably find no use for marketing information, but it may come in very handy next year. The club member seldom will market berries except locally through the grocery stores or from house to house.

No matter where the boy or girl attempts to sell strawberries there are a number of things that must be remembered and must be actually done if success is to be the result. In the first place the berries must be good from the top to the bottom of the box. They must be put up in a neat container and packed in a way that is attractive to the eye of the average housewife. Always make it a policy to give over-measure rather than exact measure as this will induce many of them to buy again. Be always courteous to your customers and as business-like as possible. Make an effort to obtain regular customers who will take so many quarts a week on certain days. Offer a reduction in regular prices where large quantities are to be bought to can.

Strawberry Boxes

The club member who is going to sell berries locally will find it necessary to have boxes. Of course many used strawberry boxes can be secured, but they are usually badly stained and mussed so that they do not make an attractive looking package. Used boxes will answer the purpose if they are not too badly stained.

The ordinary strawberry boxes that we see on the market can be bought (in the flat) for around $0.00 per thousand. They can be easily assembled and tacked as they are to be used. It is not very likely that any club member will go into marketing berries intensively enough to warrant the purchasing of boxes in thousand lots.

A very good neat box can be easily made by any boy or girl from stiff paper or card board. In making boxes in which to sell strawberries, remember that they must be full dry quarts or pints or you will be breaking the law. A legal dry quart in the United States contains 67 1/5 cubic inches, and your quart boxes must be at least that large. A box 4 1/2 inches square and 2 3/4 inches deep is just about a legal dry quart (slightly over-size).

To make homemade boxes use either very heavy paper or light cardboard. A piece of this material 11 1/2 inches square will make the box. First you must have something solid and of the exact shape and size of the box over which to fold the material into the shape of the box. For this use a block of wood 4 1/4 inches square. With a ruler and pencil draw a heavy line around this block exactly 3 3/8 inches from the end which will mark the top of the box. On each side of this block nail or screw a piece of heavy sheet metal which is for the purpose of clenching the staples which hold the box together.
Take the square of heavy paper and fold it over the block as shown in Figure 2. Then take the over-lapping end (a) Figure 2, and bend it downward to the block as shown in Figure 3. One of the protruding corners is then folded over against the block (Figure 4) and then the other corner folded over the first one (Figure 5). A light staple is then driven through the folded corners and will hold them secure, being clenched by the metal strip. This procedure is then carried out with the other over-lapping end after which the completed box (Figure 6) is lifted off the block.

If a good grade of stiff paper or light cardboard is used, a good attractive box can be made. When material that has been paraffined is used the strawberry stains can be washed off and the boxes used again.

For the individual who is close to a good market and who expects to grow strawberries commercially, we would suggest the use of the regular strawberry boxes which can be purchased "knocked down" in thousand lots. For the boy or girl club member who has but a small patch and wishes to sell some fruit, the homemade box is really practical.