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PROPAGATION AND RENEWAL OF STRAWBERRIES

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During the month of August there usually is a dull period for the strawberry club member. At this time there is nothing new coming up and because of this we feel that this month would be an excellent time to go into the propagation of strawberries and the renewal of strawberry beds. Every club member who intends to grow a few strawberries every year surely will find good use for this information.

Propagation

Strawberries may be propagated by seed, runners and plant division, but for practical purposes strawberries are increased only from runners.

How New Varieties are Created

Should the club member become so deeply interested in strawberry culture that he would like to experiment along the line of creating new varieties, he should proceed by growing berry plants from seed. Our commercial varieties do not "come true" from seed. The seedling plants resulting from seed planting vary greatly in value for cultivation. Probably not one plant in many thousand will be as good as our commonly grown varieties, yet there is always that chance of finding an outstanding plant. Once that plant is found it can then be increased by runners. All plants made as the result of runners from the mother plant will be "true", that is exactly like the mother plant. To raise strawberries from seed for experimental purposes, crush the berries when dead ripe in a small amount of dry sand. The seed and sand should then be sown in a partly shaded bed of rich soil. As soon as they are well up the plants should be transplanted to a new bed, being placed about four inches apart. These plants should be well mulched for the winter to prevent winter injury. In the spring the plants should be moved to the fruiting bed where they should be grown in hills. These plants will bear fruit the following season, or two years from the time the seed was sown. It is perfectly possible for some South Dakota boy or girl to discover a new and better variety of strawberry for South Dakota conditions by the above described procedure.
Propagation by Runners

The strawberry plant is propagated so easily that many of our commercial growers do not patronize nurseries except to secure new varieties. One of the chief advantages of home grown plants is that there never need be a long delay in transplanting them. On the other hand the nursery men are usually able to produce better plants than the common grower because it is his business.

How to Secure Home Grown Plants

Plants set from runners, which are taken from beds and which have fruited for two or three years without being carefully renewed each year, usually lack vigor. The strongest plants can usually be secured from the beds that have not fruited or from those that have fruited for only one year. The plants may be dug either in the fall or the spring. If dug in the fall they should be well heeled in and mulched over winter. Plants removed from the fruiting bed in the spring should be dug as early as possible as late digging often disturbs the roots of the fruiting plants, these reducing the yield. In removing plants for setting be sure you take only young plants. Young plants have nearly white roots while those of the old ones are very dark in color. Some claim that the first plant produced on each runner is the best, but the second or third plant may be just as good as the first as far as ability to produce fruit is concerned.

In digging plants for transplanting, do not use a spade as this cuts off the roots. A flat-tined spading fork is an excellent tool for this purpose. Never allow the roots of the plants to be exposed to the sun or wind. Even a slight drying of the roots may prove fatal to the young plants. Place the plants as they are dug in a basket lined and covered with several layers of wet burlap which will prevent their drying. If the plants are to be transported for considerable distances before planting, they should be
bunched (25 to 5C per bunch), the roots covered with wet moss or burlap and this wrapped in oil paper. The tops of the plants should be left uncovered.

How Long Will Plants Produce Good Crops?

Theoretically the strawberry is a perennial plant, that is it will produce fruit indefinitely, but in actual practice this does not hold true. When grown in hills under proper care, strawberries have been known to produce good crops for over 20 years, but under our northern conditions it seldom pays to fruit plants over two years under the matted-row system of training or over three or four years when grown in hills.

The number of crops that can be taken from one setting of plants depends upon the location and its climate, method of culture and the variety grown. In the north it pays to fruit strawberries longer than in the south, where it is the practice to fruit plants only one year. Strawberries grown in hills can be successfully fruit ed for a year or two longer than they can be when the matted-row system is used. Certain varieties such as Candy and Sharpless are slow to mature and can be fruit ed longer, but these varieties are not as successful in South Dakota as the more quickly maturing varieties.

How Are Home Strawberry Beds Renewed?

Since it is evident that plants cannot be successfully fruit ed for more than three years, the grower must look for means by which his bed can be renewed so that his strawberry crop will be a permanent one. This can be accomplished in several ways.

For the average home strawberry bed, we believe a practical method of renewing the bed is simply extending the bed by one third each year and then plowing up the oldest one third at the end of each bearing season. After this system is put into practice, the new planting can be placed on that part of the bed which was plowed up the previous season. In this way the bed is extended each year without continually requiring a new grant. This system can be illustrated by the following diagram:
For example, we will consider the above patch as being in existence in the spring of 1923. After the bearing season, Plot 1 will be plowed up and in the spring of 1924 it will be planted to new plants taken from that part of the patch having the youngest plants. After the 1924 bearing season, Plot 2 will be plowed up and replanted with young plants in the spring of 1925. If this system is carried out year after year, some new plants will be continually coming on and at the same time no plants will be allowed to fruit for more than three years. Where strawberries are grown in hills it should be remembered that enough hills should be allowed to set runners to supply new plants to replant the additional area each year.

Where the berries are grown in matted rows and it is impossible to secure more land to renew the bed by the above system, the following method can be used. The matted rows which usually are from 2 to 2½ feet wide are narrowed down to strips 6 or 8 inches wide, either by plowing or spading up all plants outside of the above mentioned strip. All older plants in the remaining strips are then removed with a hoe. After this treatment the old bed looks much like a new planting. In this manner a bed can be almost entirely renewed without losing a full crop of fruit.