Jun 2022

THE BUMBLEBEE

Skookum Food Provisioners' Coop Newsletter

Working together to build and maintain a healthy regional food system

FROM THE SKOOKUM BOARD

Member Information Update

Skookum is updating the membership database and we need your help!

Please fill in this form with your most current contact information. With this information we can ensure you continue to receive appropriate communications from Skookum.

Skookum Community Picnic

To celebrate the return of summer weather (finally!), your Board proposes a Skookum picnic, possibly on Sunday, August 7, at Palm Beach. We would bring our sandwiches and children and well-behaved dogs and hopefully gather under a shade tree near the beach and while away the afternoon, playing games and of course, eating. Can we please have a show of hands in the form of a quick email to barbara.trottier@gmail.com. Any suggestions/objections also welcome.

Cider Press team

We now have some folks willing to help do testing and set up to get the press ready for use. Thank you! Still need someone(s) to be the keeper of the key for the press, ideally (but not necessarily) living in Westview for easy access to the storage location at the CRC. Please contact Kevin, kevcombo@gmail.com

Gleaners

We are gearing up for Gleaning in 2022!
We need to update our records before the 2022 picking season officially starts. This means that only people who actually want to pick will get Gleaners emails, and all the info we have on file for you (including waiver) is up to date. No waiver, no picking.

Please update your info and sign the updated yearly waiver through this link if you have not already in 2022.

If you have questions about this update process, **please contact Adriana:**
virtueadriana@gmail.com or
604-344-0531

Fall Fair team

Early days yet, but it's time to start thinking about Skookum's presence at the Fall Fair (Sep 24 and 25, noon-5pm). Will we make cider again to raise funds for Skookum, using our lovely new press? If you've helped at Fall Fair in the past, we need your knowledge and experience! Please contact Kevin, kevcombo@gmail.com

WATERING

HOW SHOULD I WATER MY PLANTS?

There are two basic factors when watering:

1. “How Much”
2. “How Often”

Watering frequency depends on a number of different things:

- type of planting
- weather
- soil type
- how you water

For regular plants (i.e not succulents, cacti or swamp plants) then the soil should be damp, but not soggy, 1 to 2 inches below the surface, whether that’s in a pot or in the ground.

If the soil is sandy it needs to be watered more often but with less water at each session than clay soil - that’s because if you put too much water into sand it simply runs away through the soil and is wasted. Clay will hold onto the water. Soils with a lot of organic matter will also hold on to water.

For plants growing outdoors, the usual recommendation is 1 inch of water a week - but that’s way too general. It’s a good starting point but you need to adjust for your own conditions. You might start by giving two waterings of ½" each per week for sandy soil, or one watering of 1" for clay soil and check the results.

How do you know what 1" looks like? If you’re sprinkling or hand-watering, you can place a flat, straight-sided container like a tuna can on the ground in the watered area, and measure the depth of water in it at the end of the session. It’s a little more difficult for drip or soaker hose systems – there you’ll need to check the depth of watering by digging a test hole after your watering session, rather than relying on numbers like 1".

If the weather has been cool or damp or if you have mulch on the soil then you need to water less. If you have heavy plant cover (plants “transpire” water from the soil, through their stems and leaves, into the air), sunshine and/or high temperatures then you need to water more.

How to decide how often to water:

If you have trees and shrubs or other established, deep-rooted plants; clay soil; high organic matter; mulch, drip, sprinkler, or soaker hose watering; you can water less frequently.
If you have young plants; newly seeded beds; sandy soil; or hand watering methods, then you need to water more frequently.

You want to water often enough that the soil 1 to 2 inches down below the surface stays damp. Next time you come to water, dig down and check: if the soil is dry then you waited too long and need to water more frequently. If it's soggy then you don't need to water and could leave it longer between waterings.

If your plants are in containers try not to let peat-based soil dry out, it is very hard to re-wet. Coir (coconut fiber) based soils are easier to wet when they have become dry.

WHEN SHOULD I FEED MY PLANTS?

Feed your plants when they have used up the nutrition that's available to them.

For example:

- When seeds have sprouted and grown one true leaf, they have used up all the nutrients that were in the seed, and need to begin finding nutrients in the soil. You need to either transplant them into soil containing nutrients, or feed them with some kind of fertilizer.
- When you set out transplants, you often add some fertilizer at planting time. If your soil does not contain plenty of nutrition in itself then you will need to feed again after about one month.
- For container plants, adding some fertilizer to the soil each year is the minimum. Some more heavily-feeding plants need weekly or monthly top-ups

Amount of fertilizer needed depends on:

- The type of plant. Some plants need very little fertilizer and some a lot.
- Soil type: soils with high clay or organic matter content hold on to more nutrients than sandy soil does.
- Watering and rainfall: too much leaches out soluble nutrients.
- Type of fertilizer: liquids act over the short term, while others can last longer.

As a longer-term strategy: **Feed the soil!**

DRYING

HOW TO DRY BASIL

By Melissa Leigh

It's difficult to dry whole leaf basil so that the leaves stay green.

The following method can be used for keeping the green in most delicate herbs:

- Rinse off the fresh herb, and then shake out excess moisture using a salad spinner.
- Slice leaves into bits with a sharp knife.
- Put parchment paper on a cookie sheet, and then spread out the basil bits.
- Cover loosely with a brown paper bag or newspaper.
- Place the tray in a warm, dry room for a few days -- stirring up the drying basil periodically

For processing lots of basil, a few pulses in the food processor saves cutting time.

Just make sure to stir the drying leaves more often.

GROWING STRAWBERRIES FOR R E A L FLAVOUR!

June Featured article

Those red things you can buy in the supermarket in winter do not taste like real strawberries. Growing strawberries yourself is a great way to get that real, old-fashioned strawberry flavor - and it's easy to do.

In this article I'll cover picking a location, preparing the soil, buying or growing young plants, planting strawberries (including when to plant), and growing strawberries in pots.

Types of Strawberries You Can Grow

There are several different kinds of strawberries available, and unfortunately the labeling you see when you find them in nurseries is not always accurate. Apart from wild or alpine strawberries, there are three kinds of strawberries which give the delicious, juicy red fruit we know and love:

June-Bearers: These are the traditional strawberry plants which fruit in - surprise! - June in their traditional growing areas, crop heavily for a few weeks, and then stop fruiting for the rest of the year. This type is best if you want lots of strawberries in a short time, maybe for making jam or drying for winter. June-bearers produce the most runners. They come in early, mid and late-season varieties, so the "June" in their name is not necessarily accurate about when you'll get fruit.

Ever-bearing: This type produces several "flushes" of fruit during spring, summer and fall, but not as much at once as June-bearers.

Day-Neutral Strawberries produce a continuous trickle of berries over the whole season, in some years in my garden right into November. They are great if you want a bowl of strawberries every few days, but you don't need a lot all at once. Day Neutral and Everbearing varieties are often all marked as Everbearing in nurseries.

Strawberry Varieties

There are far too many varieties available for me to list them all here. Be aware, though, that different varieties are adapted to different climate regions. If you buy your plants from a local nursery rather than a chain store, or you get them from a neighbor, you are likely to get a variety that is well adapted locally. Here are some good resources for varieties:

Methods for Growing Strawberries

You can grow strawberries in a number of different ways:

1. Right in the ground, in a wide row or bed. This is the traditional method and there are several different styles. Mainly, you plant a single or multiple row of plants, then either remove the runners and keep to the original plants, or let all the runners root and grow within the boundaries of a wide strip or bed. Removing runners is more work but the bed is more controlled. Letting runners root and grow results in what's called a "matted row", a very accurate description.

2. In a raised bed, either on the ground or up on legs. This is very good if you have badly drained or alkaline soil, because it means you can adjust the soil and drainage in the bed to the strawberries' liking. It can also help with keeping the plants confined to a linited area.

3. In a container, either a special strawberry pot with openings in the sides, or a regular pot. A single strawberry plant will be reasonably happy in a gallon pot, or you can use a bigger pot and plant several plants. Strawberry pots are very decorative in their own right and create a very compact way to grow strawberries.

4. Any of the above methods can be used to produce early strawberries by adding some weather protection: cloches are traditional, but I have grown strawberries in my hoophouse in BC, Canada and harvested fruit about 6 weeks early. If you have your strawberries planted in containers you could bring some into a sunroom or greenhouse to get early fruit.

Choosing a Location

Strawberries like good, moist soil with good drainage (so sandy or loamy soils are preferred), pH of 5.5 - 7 (that's slightly acid to neutral) and plenty of sun (unless you are growing in a very hot location). Since they like to spread, it's also a good idea to give them extra space from the beginning. A location with plenty of ventilation is also useful, to keep molds and fungus diseases at bay.

Strawberry plants are winter hardy in our area, but start to have trouble where temperatures go below 10-20 degrees F.

Because strawberries are badly affected by verticillium wilt, it's recommended that you don't plant where other crops that tend to get verticillium have previously grown. That means raspberries and tomato-family plants: tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and potatoes. However, if you're certain that there's no verticillium in your soil, you don't need to worry about that.

Planting Strawberries

Step 1: Getting Your Strawberry Plants

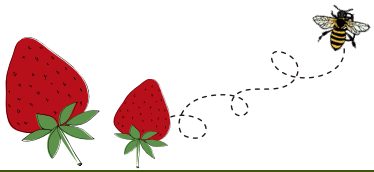
There are three main ways to get strawberry plants.

1. From a nursery. They come either in bundles/boxes of 10-20 plants, or potted up. The bundled plants often look pretty sad, with only a few tufts of leaves at the top, but in fact they establish and grow on very well. Potted strawberry plants are ridiculously expensive in comparison - only buy them if they are the only thing you can find, or if you only want one or two.

2. From a neighbor: most people who have strawberries growing in the ground are overrun with runners (baby plants). You can often get some for free, or pick them up at garage sales. The downsides with this cheap method are that you will often have no idea what variety you are getting, or even what type, and it's possible to bring in diseases with the plants.

3. Grow them from seed: some seed companies sell seed for special varieties, but you can also apparently save strawberry seed and grow plants from them. If you give it a try, let me know how you get on.

4. http://www.strawberries-for-strawberry-lovers.com/growing-strawberries-from-seeds.html



Step 2: Preparing the Soil

Strawberries like loamy, well-drained soil, a bit on the acid side. So, if you have sandy soil, that's a good start: add organic matter like compost, or composted manure, check the pH and adjust it if necessary, and you are good to go. If your soil is clay, you can amend it with lots of organic matter to loosen it up, or make a raised bed and fill it with loam so you're not really using the clay soil at all. Just make sure that water can drain away out of the bottom of the raised bed.

If you use manure, you may not need any fertilizer: otherwise I like to use a complete dry organic fertilizer. Dig the ground over well, breaking up any big lumps, and mix in any soil amendments you are using. If you already have an established growing area, a fork will do the job without destroying existing soil structure as much as tilling.

An alternative to digging is to use a sheet-mulching or "lasagna bed" method. While this method does mean you don't have to do heavy digging, for a bed of any size you need a LOT of organic materials, and it can be as much work gathering and stacking it as digging would have been. For a smallish bed, lasagna methods are very good. I have built a large garden using this method and it does indeed work well and grow good plants.

Step 3: Planting Your Strawberries

When to Plant Strawberries

In most areas, strawberries are planted in the spring, and that's when they appear in nurseries and at plant sales. Ideally, you want to plant after the last frost but before spring rains end: in practice, young strawberry plants will take a light frost with no damage, and you can always water them if there's no rain. If you can, pick a cool, overcast day with rain forecast to let the young plants get a few roots working before the hot sun comes out again. Strawberries do prefer some cool spring weather to get properly rooted before summer heat comes on.

Bunched plants with bare roots benefit from having their roots wetted and allowed to soak up water the day before planting. Don't let them sit in water more than a few hours, though: you don't want to drown them! Keep them damp until planting time.

OK, so you have your plants, and the bed all prepared: it's a cool, cloudy day: you're ready to plant! Gather your tools and materials:

plants + hand trowel + compost + watering can or bucket full of water

(this can be very dilute manure or compost tea if you like)

There's a little bit or preparation needed for the plants:

For rooted runners, separate them out so you can see how big the rootballs are and so they are not all matted together. Remove any dead or rotten leaves, stalks, roots or old runner stems.

If you have bare-root plants in bunches or boxes, separate them out, discard any totally dead ones, remove dead or rotten leaves, stalks, roots or old runner stems, and trim any wildly long roots so you can fit them in the planting hole without curling them around. If you have more plants than you'll need, pick out the best and healthiest-looking to plant now.

Potted plants can be removed from their pots one at a time as you come to plant them - as for the others, trim off dead or rotten leaves, stalks, roots or old runner stems. If the roots have started to circle round and round in the pot, pull them out and if necessary trim some off.

OK, now we can actually get these babies in the ground!

For each plant, dig a hole with your trowel, large enough to take the rootball or the spread-out bare roots, plus a bit, and deep enough that the plant will be at the same level it was growing before, plus a bit deeper.

Add a trowel of compost to the bottom of the hole, and mix it in a bit.

Place your plant in the hole, If it's a bare-root plant, spread the roots out in the hole. You want them to be pointing outwards, not circling around in the hole. Set the plant so the crown (where the leaves spring from) is level with the ground. You can tuck some more compost under the plant if you need to, to get it at the right level.

Water in the plant by filling the hole almost to the top with water (this is also called "puddling in", a very descriptive and accurate term!)

Fill in the hole around the plant with the soil you dug out in the first place, and firm round the plant with your hands. "Firm" means to press down enough that the roots are in solid contact with the soil, but not so hard that you press out all the air spaces.

Once you have all your plants in, you may well have some spares. Resist the temptation to stuff them into the bed anyway: pot them up in some compost and keep them to one side to replace any that die, to give away, or to plant in a strawberry pot - see "Growing Strawberries in Pots", below.

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Newly planted strawberries need to put their energy into growing roots and leaves, not berries, so now comes the painful part: for 6 weeks after planting, you should pick off all the blossoms! The plants won't die if you don't do this, but they will give more fruit in succeeding years if you do.

Growing Strawberries in Pots

Strawberries grow very well in pots, both special “strawberry pots” with cupped holes in the sides, and regular pots where you plant in the top. A single strawberry plant will manage OK in a one gallon pot, while larger pots can take more plants.

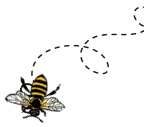
The biggest issue with growing pots, not just for strawberries but pretty much any plant, is watering. In the hot weather, pots need watering every day, sometimes more than once, and it gets to be quite time consuming. A very good option is a drip irrigation system set up. I have one for my garden and my containers, and I highly recommend it as a time- and plant-saver!

You'll also need to fertilize your plants once they have been in the container for a while. You can use compost or manure tea, diluted fish fertilizer, diluted urine, “weed tea” etc.

Caring for Your Strawberry Plants

Watering

Strawberries do not like to dry out. They need 1-2" of water a week, and benefit from using a soaker hose or drip system to soak the roots deeply without wasting a lot of water.



Mulching

To conserve water, keep the soil damp, and keep the fruit clean, many people mulch their strawberries, either with organic materials or black or red plastic. Good organic materials to use include straw and grass clippings. If you use grass clippings, use them dry (up to 2" thick) or in a thin layer if they are fresh. Fresh grass clippings piled too thick will heat up as they decompose, due to the high nitrogen content, and damage the strawberry plants. Once the thin layer has dried out, though, you can add another thin layer, etc.

Black or red plastic mulches are usually applied to the bed first, then the plants are planted into holes in the mulch. Black mulch warms the soil and keeps weeds down and berries clean. Red mulch was shown in studies to increase fruit production for strawberries and tomatoes, but when I tried it didn't notice any difference. I prefer not to use plastic mulches.

Don't use clear plastic as mulch! It will cook your soil and the plant roots!

If you have major slug problems, you may not be able to mulch at all. Try mulching part of the patch and see how it goes.

Fertilizing

If you fertilized when planting, the plants should have plenty to see them through the first few months. June bearers need fertilizing after they have been cut back after fruiting. Day Neutrals and Everbearers can be fertilized after the first flush of fruit has died down. Don't fertilize too close to the cold weather: you don't want the plants to go into the winter with soft new growth.

Propagation

Strawberries want to take over the world, like most plants, and they do it by means of runners: long stringy stalks which grow a baby plant every so often along their length. If the baby plant finds soil it will grow roots and, once established, can be cut away from its parent plant and grown on into a new fruiting plant.

Pests and Diseases

Rather than go into a lot of detail here, I'll cover a few points and then point you to the Wikipedia strawberry diseases page, a horrifying read.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_strawberry_diseases

Birds love strawberries as much as people do. One traditional protection for this is to take clear glass jars and slip them over the ripening fruit trusses. This allows the sun to continue ripening the berries while foiling the birds. Make sure water can't pool in the bottom of the jar and rot the fruit. If you have a large strawberry patch this gets tedious, and a good alternative is to build a frame that holds netting over the whole bed. If you grow a lot of fruit of different kinds, and have trouble with birds, try the idea of a fruit cage: a netting enclosure for ALL your small fruits, with a netting roof high enough for people to walk around inside, and a door to go in by.

Slugs love strawberries as much as birds and people do. Use your usual slug-battling methods. Mine include copper strips round the edge of the bed, and hand-picking with a flashlight at night.

GROWING WINTER VEGETABLES

Growing vegetables can seem like a full-time job, especially if you plant for most of the year. Spring and summer are the common times for planting most vegetables, but the winter garden can also provide some wonderful treats. Growing winter vegetables takes a bit of practice and timing, but the results are very rewarding. Your winter vegetable garden can provide healthy alternatives to store-bought food well into the winter months.

The trick to creating a good winter garden is choosing the right plants. Cold-loving vegetables like broad beans, purple-sprouting broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots, parsnips and some varieties of greens grow quite well in the winter garden, or hold for harvesting even if they don't actively grow. Understanding when to plant these vegetables will make your gardening efforts much easier.

Brussels sprouts in February in the snow

Some of the easiest plants to grow include Brussels sprouts and purple sprouting broccoli. Brussels sprouts are long season plants and transplants can be set out from April to June to harvest from November all through the winter. Sprouting broccoli is usually seeded in June in this area, to plant out in Jul/Aug, and will be ready to harvest in the early to mid spring.

Garlic overwinters from a fall planting (Oct-Dec) for harvest the following summer, though you can harvest some greens in the early spring if you have plenty in your planting. Winter leeks are also wonderful winter plants that need to be started early - Feb if you're growing from seed! - and have a long, long growing season but can then be harvested all winter and into spring.

Corn salad or lamb's lettuce, some mustard greens, and endive are types of greens that retain their growth through the colder weather. Some varieties of lettuce can do well with some winter protection. For all these, you'll see very little growth from mid Nov to the end of Jan, but can harvest already-grown leaves.

Parsnips and kale are some of the most hardy of the cold-weather vegetables. Parsnips can stay in the ground throughout the entire winter. They do very well under snow cover and can be harvested until late in the winter months. Kale survives above ground in most cold places.

Carrots will overwinter well in the ground provided you don't have wireworms which will eat them where they grow, and that they have not already been damaged by carrot rust fly maggots.

leeks in February in the snow

"Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace." ~ Mary Sarton