



THREE STRAWBERRY TYPES SWEETEN WYOMING TABLES

Chris Hilgert

Who doesn't like strawberries? Growing them can be challenging in Wyoming but is worth the effort.

Types of Strawberries

There are three types of strawberries: June-bearing, everbearing, and day-neutral. **June-bearing** varieties produce flowers and fruit once each year, usually in June. **Everbearing** varieties produce two crops per year, usually in July and August-September. **Day-neutral** varieties produce a continuous crop throughout the growing season.

June-bearing Strawberries

Generally, June-bearing plants produce the largest strawberries and large yields. These are attractive characteristics for commercial growers, but home gardeners could be left wondering what to do with an enormous amount of fruit all at once. One challenge Wyoming gardeners face growing June-bearing strawberries is the time they flower. A June frost is not uncommon in Wyoming. Freezing temperatures while the plants are flowering can result in a complete loss of that year's crop.

Wyoming gardeners growing June-bearing strawberries should consider growing in high tunnels to protect the plants against cold temperatures during flowering. June-bearing varieties grown outdoors can also be mulched with straw in spring to delay flowering. Some varieties to consider include Honeoye, Guardian, Kent, Redchief, Delite, Jewel, Mesabi, A.C., Wendy, Cabot, Bloominden Gem, Carskill, and Geneva.

Everbearing Strawberries

Because everbearing varieties flower and produce fruit later in the year, the chance of cold temperatures during fruit production is reduced, making these more reliable producers. While they are more reliable producers, everbearing varieties tend to produce smaller, but still delicious, strawberries. The Fort Laramie variety is probably the most common strawberry grown in Wyoming, often successfully outdoors with no cover. Quinalt and Ogallala are other varieties Wyoming gardeners can try.

Day-Neutral Strawberries

My personal preference for strawberries is day-neutral varieties. I also

prefer to grow in high tunnels to extend the growing season and protect the plants from winter kill, birds, and other critters that enjoy eating strawberries. Grown in a high tunnel, they can produce a continuous crop from May-November. Grown outdoors, plants can produce from June-September. Extreme heat can slow or stop flowering during the hottest part of the summer, but this has not been an issue in Laramie. Tribute, Tristar, Fern, and Sea Scape are among the most cold-hardy, day-neutral varieties, but grown outdoors with no protection these plants may suffer from extremely cold Wyoming winters.



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Growing Systems

Matted Row System for June-bearing Varieties

June-bearing varieties are planted 18-24 inches apart in the row, and rows are spaced 36-48 inches. Allow runners to fill in the row with five to six plants per square foot. This creates a dense "matted row" of strawberry plants. Once the matted row has filled in, remove other runners. To easily work and harvest plants, maintain an aisle 1 to 2 feet wide between 3- to 4-foot wide matted rows. First-year plants should have all flowers removed to help the plants develop a vigorous root system. Harvest in the second year and beyond. After the second year, the matted rows should be renovated yearly. To do this, cut foliage to 2 inches following harvest. Next, cultivate strips 8-10 inches wide, leaving alternate strips 8-10 inches wide untouched. Allow runners to fill in cultivated areas and alternate strips in future years. Water 1 inch per week during blossoming and fruit production and half that water when plants are not in production. Fertilize plants after harvest.

Hill System for Everbearing and Day-Neutral Varieties

Using the hill system, plants are spaced 12 inches apart in double or triple rows. Maintain an aisle 1-2 feet wide between double or triple rows to allow for weeding and harvesting. Remove runners periodically as they develop and are not filling in the rows. Remove the first flush of flowers in first-year plantings but allow flowers to develop later. This will delay harvest, but you will get a crop from a first-year planting. Water plants 1 inch per week throughout the growing season. Fertilize everbearing varieties in spring and summer, and fertilize day-neutral varieties lightly, but regularly throughout the growing season.

Harvesting

Water and fertility are important as the plants flower and ripen fruit. As fruit ripens, you will want to pick every two to three days, picking berries when they are completely red. Pick berries, cap and all. Strawberries picked ripe have a shelf life of less than a week. Picking berries with a little pink, rather than fully red, will

extend the shelf life a few days but will sacrifice flavor.

Growing in High Tunnels vs. Growing Outdoors

High tunnels offer several advantages to growing strawberries outdoors. High tunnels protect plants from winter temperatures, drying winds, animals, spring freezes, and extend the growing season for day-neutral varieties. Grown outdoors, extreme cold winter temperatures can kill plants. Row covers can protect plants from winds and pests but must be removed when temperatures are 80 degrees or warmer. Fences and netting can deter birds and other animals, and mulch can be used to conserve soil moisture, suppress weeds, and delay flowering for June-bearing varieties.

Strawberries do require regular attention through the growing season. Watering, weeding, and harvesting should not be neglected or the strawberry patch will decline. Given appropriate care, strawberries can be productive in the garden for many years.

*We get the impression **Chris Hilgert** might like strawberries. He's the Master Gardener state coordinator for University of Wyoming Extension and can be reached at (307) 766-6870 or chilgert@uwyo.edu.*