

Growing soft fruit in your garden

There are many publications which will provide details of growing systems but start with the "RHS Fruit Garden Displayed".

Things to consider:

- Each strawberry plant should give you about 1kg of fruit.
- Each Raspberry cane, when established, should give you about 500g of fruit.
- Strawberry varieties are of two types: June bearers and Everbearers. The June bearers will fruit, strangely enough, in June but some varieties are late fruiting and will extend the season through into August/September, depending upon where you live. Everbearers produce fruit from June/July through to frost but the plants are usually only grown for one year.
- Varieties of June bearers are numerous, some examples to give continuity, would be Honeoye, Emily, Rosie or Mae as early varieties to choose from followed by a maincrop variety like Elsanta, Pegasus or Alice and a later variety Symphony, Florence or Rhapsody.
- Varieties of Everbearers are less common but names to look out for are Flamenco, Diamante, Everest and Aromel.
- Raspberries similarly come in 2 types; those which fruit on the cane produced the previous year and those which fruit late in the year on cane produced the same year(Primo cane).
- Within the first group are varieties like Glen Ample, Glen Moy, Tulameen and Glen Magna. The primo cane group include Autumn Bliss and Allgold, a very attractive and tasty yellow raspberry.

Soil preparation

Regardless of whether you are growing one or the other or both fruits the soil preparation should be very thorough. Preferably double dig the area.

Check the pH of the soil and correct with lime if necessary. If the soil is very acid then apply half the lime in the autumn and dig it in followed by the remainder in the Spring before planting.

Raspberries will appreciate a generous amount of organic matter at their roots whereas strawberries will produce leaves and very little fruit if given lush growing conditions.

Strawberries are most easily grown on a raised bed which is covered with a black plastic mulch to prevent weed growth and keep the fruit clean and

disease free. Two rows spaced 30-40cm apart with an in-row spacing of 30cm on each bed will allow easy access for picking.

Raspberries should be planted on a ridge if the soil is at all poorly drained at a spacing of 50cm apart in the row and about 1.5 to 2m apart between the rows.

Make sure the roots of the plants don't dry out before planting or during establishment.

Strawberries require very little fertiliser after an initial balanced base dressing and thereafter use potassium sulphate (sulphate of potash) at about 15-20g/m² each spring. Don't attempt to keep strawberries going for years and years, the fruit quality will deteriorate as will the vigour of the plant.

Raspberries require more fertiliser to grow new cane and produce fruit. A general fertiliser, like Growmore (7:7:7) should be applied before planting at about 60-70g/m² and probably a "Rose fertiliser", which contains more potassium, in subsequent years.

Pests and Diseases

As with all crops there is a complete range of insects and diseases which attack at regular, and almost predictable, intervals:

- Aphids, (Greenfly), most damaging in the spring on new growth.
- Vine Weevil ... watch out for serrated leaves and treat with a biological control during the early autumn.
- Botrytis, (Grey mould), caused by fruit being in contact with the soil or damp conditions.
- Mildew can attack raspberries as well as strawberries, usually caused by the plant being under stress and therefore more susceptible.

Other fruits to consider growing:

Black, white and red currants, gooseberries, brambles and the hybrids between raspberry and bramble, blueberry and our own native blaeberry, lingonberry, and cranberry amongst others, of which there are many.