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HOME COURSE IN FRUITS AND BERRIES

CULTIVATION OF STRAWBERRIES.

By L. C. CORBETT, Horticulturist, Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

IN the strawberry a very attractive subject for development is presented. It is a plant which is readily propagated by seeds, which is, of course, the only means of securing new forms. The seeds may be selected from plants showing the desired tendencies, or they may be produced by crossing two plants possessing characteristics which it would be desirable to combine in one plant. But fortunately for the breeder the strawberry is provided with a means of self preservation through the agency of runners (stolons), which enables the propagator to perpetuate any plant he may develop without fear of loss or change of characters.

When the main crop is the plants the aim is to get these as large and strong as possible, and to this end the ground is made rich and put in good tilth by frequent cultivation early in the season.

The home production of runners for one's own planting is quite another matter. The fruit crop is the chief object, and the production of runners prior to harvesting the fruit is discouraged. The difficulty with this method is to secure strong, well developed plants for August and September planting. When the main planting is done in the spring the earliness of the plants is of less importance. In favorable seasons, however, strong plants for

A WELL ROOTED PLANT WITH SMALL CROWN.

August and September planting can be secured even in the New England states. The question of the desirability of purchasing or of growing one's own plants must be decided by the planter.

Field practices in the cultivation of strawberries vary in different sections of the country to conform to climatic and soil conditions. The factor most influenced by conditions of soil and climate is the time of setting. In some sections the rainfall will permit of either spring or autumn planting, while in others plants can only be successfully set during the fall.

Selection of Soil.

The soil considered best suited to the cultivation of the strawberry in the northeastern part of the United States is what is known as a sandy or gravelly loam. A warm, quick soil, although naturally poor, is to be preferred to a heavy, retentive soil well supplied with plant food. The lacking plant food can easily be supplied by the addition of fertilizers, while the physical characteristics of the soil can only be modified with great difficulty by cultivation, drainage and the addition of organic matter. Congenial soil and exposure are therefore important considerations. The plants not only thrive better on light soils, but the crop is more abundant, and the berries are larger and sweeter. The period of maturity can also be modified within reasonable limits by selecting soils which force or retard ripening, by securing southern or eastern exposures, which give the plants the advantage of the first warm days of spring, or by placing them on northern and western slopes, where by the use of heavy mulches the time of ripening may be delayed as much as ten days, and by the use of late ripening sorts can be extended even longer.

The land to be devoted to the growing of strawberries should, if possible, be planted in a cultivated crop, such as potatoes, beans or corn, at least one year previous to setting the plants, in order that the larvae of such insects as wireworms, white grubs, cutworms, etc., may be as completely eliminated as possible. Sod land is a favorite breeding ground for such insects and should therefore be avoided unless it be new clover sod, which can be turned under with good results.

Previous to setting the plants the soil should be deeply plowed in order that all organic matter of whatever nature on the surface may be completely turned under. Immediately following the plow the land should be thoroughly pulverized by the use of the harrow, and the surface should be reduced to a condition which would form an ideal seed bed.

Preparation of the Soil.

If the soil is not rich for best results it should have a dressing of at least twenty cart loads of well decomposed stable manure per acre, either plowed under or incorporated with the soil by surface culture after plowing. If stable manure is not available plant food should be supplied by a liberal use of finely ground bone, chemical manures and potash. The use upon the plants at blooming time of highly nitrogenous manures, such as nitrate of soda, at the rate of about 100 pounds per acre, often proves of great value. If it can be applied in solution it will give quicker results than if put on in the form of a salt. If the fertility of the soil is little more than sufficient to support this plant when the heavy strain of fruit production comes on the plant will only perfect the number of fruits its food supply will allow; hence the advantage of applying quickly available plant foods just at this critical time.

Plants with small crowns—i. e., a moderate growth of leaves—and with an abundant development of fibrous roots are the most desirable. If the leaf area seems to be too great for the root system of the plant the removal of two or three of the older leaves will prove an advantage.

Horticultural varieties of strawberries occur with imperfect (or pistillate) flowers as well as with perfect flowers (those containing both stamens and pistils). It is important that the planter give careful attention to this point in making his plantation, as a patch made up of pistillate sorts alone will be unproductive, while many such sorts when properly interspersed with perfect flowered varieties have proved to be our largest fruited sorts and most prolific bearers. There is no way of distinguishing the perfect from the imperfect plants when not in bloom.

When to Set the Plants.

There are several considerations which govern the time and manner of setting strawberry plants. The time to plant depends in humid regions more upon the rainfall than upon any other factor. If there are not timely rains at the planting season to give the plants an opportunity to establish themselves the stand will be uneven, with the result that more work will be required to keep the land free from weeds and more trouble will be necessary to get the blank spaces occupied by runners from the plants that survive. The plants that withstand the drought are checked and dwarfed. They seldom recover so as to make either satisfactory croppers or plant producers. It is most satisfactory and most economical, therefore, to choose that season which offers most advantages at planting time, other things being equal. In general there are only two seasons for planting—spring and fall—but in some localities spring planting should be done in April or May by the use of the preceding season's plants, while in others it may be done in June from the crop of runners of the same season.

In irrigated regions planting can be done at whatever season the work will give best results in future crop production. In humid regions rainfall is a determining factor. In the northern half of the prairie region west of the Mississippi spring planting gives best results. In the middle Atlantic states the work is divided between spring and August planting, with the balance in favor of the latter in some localities. In New England the work is chiefly confined to the spring months, although there are enthusiastic advocates of fall planting. In coast states south of New York August and September planting is most extensively practiced, particularly upon the more retentive soils. In the trucking region on the islands about Charleston, S. C., spring planting is extensively practiced, as it results in a paying crop the following year, while only a small crop can be harvested from fall set plants. On these quick soils the plant can be grown as an annual, and farther south, in Georgia and Florida, the fall set plants will return a profitable crop the following spring. On the heavier soils of South Carolina, however, fall planting, with the paying crop one year from the following spring, is the most profitable method. The particular time during the summer or fall when the planting should be done will be governed by the occurrence of the seasonal rains—if in July and August, plant then; if in September and October, plant at that time. If the earlier date can be taken advantage of, so much the better. The plants will have a longer period in which to grow.

How to Set the Plants.

Success in transplanting strawberry plants depends, first, upon the quality of the plant and, second, upon the time and manner of doing the work. If the plants are good the stand, other conditions being favorable, depends upon care in setting them. No plant which the gardener has to handle is more exacting in regard to depth of planting than the strawberry. As the plant is practically stemless, the base of the leaves and the roots being so close together, care is required to avoid setting the plant so deep that the terminal bud will be covered or so shallow that the upper portion of the roots will be exposed, either being a disadvantage which frequently results in loss.

Clean and shallow culture is the watchword of successful cultivators. Growers have come to realize that cultivation means more than the destruction of weeds. Mulching (covering the surface of the soil with dead or decaying vegetable matter is the meaning of the term mulching as here used) in strawberry culture serves different purposes, depending upon the locality in which the plants are grown.

Jack Ferguson, the Human Submarine, Nearly a Hero

Photos by American Press Association.

JACK FERGUSON, the human submarine, came pretty near becoming a hero. As it was, he got on the first page of some of the newspapers in and near New York. But as it turned out Jack was glad he remained only a near hero. You see, it was this way: Jack, who is a diver, went down in the Central park reservoir, New York, to see what was wrong with one of the gates, which had been out of order for the last sixteen years and which somebody in official life decided at last needed repairing. He came up in a hurry and reported that the rush of water through the gate was so great that his life was in danger. Then the story of the diver who had been caught in a reservoir at Boonton, N. J., in the same way and had lived for two days was recalled. Despite this, Jack went down a second time, taking precautions to guard himself against the rush of water. He was successful. He found that the gate was simply jammed, and he came up without trouble.

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Eugene	"	5.80	"	"	9.00
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