

Almost every gardener wants to grow strawberries but very few can do it successfully. If they are successful, they only produce good berries for 4-6 weeks in the late spring or early summer. When you really want a good strawberry they are not available or you throw away half because of bruising or mold. You can now grow strawberries (and other crops) the year-round in a vertical hydroponic growing system as long as you have the right variety, the right fertilizer and light. In the **Verti-Gro** system there are no soils or soil related diseases or insects. There are no weeds so no hoeing or spraying. There are fewer insects because there are fewer weeds and the entire system and all plants are above ground. The produce is also much cleaner.

Why can't I grow strawberries successfully year after year? There are over 80 million gardeners in the U.S. and probably most of them would like to grow strawberries. The ones that do try to grow strawberries have limited success. Strawberries can be easy or difficult. In the soil or raised beds they are difficult for the average gardener. There are a few basic concepts you have to know and stick with. For example, a June bearer will not produce much anytime but in June (plus or minus a few weeks). However, there is no reason you can't grow June bearers in the **Verti-Gro** system. You can extend the season and get good production of high quality fruit. For "U-Pick" operations outdoors this is an ideal situation. You can even use a variety like Chandler, which produces heavily in the spring and summer and tastes very good. It also has a good shelf life. Your customers will love it. Chandler is almost like an everbearer. Pacific is a great year around berry.

Everbearers or "Day Neutral" strawberries produce all the time but still have periods of low or no production. Seascape, Tri-Star, Diamante, Aromas, and Pacific are good tasting berries, and a fairly large, especially in the early production cycle. These will produce in 5-6 weeks from planting but it is advisable, but not necessary, to remove all of the flowers for the first 3 weeks. This is a good practice for any berries, whether they are bare root or cold storage plants. Selva is a day neutral but susceptible to spider mites.

When planting strawberries remove the runners, especially on frigo (or frozen) plants from California. If you want to produce your own runners for new plants increase the fertilizer, especially the nitrogen and remove the flowers. The strawberry plant is one of the few fruiting type plants that can be manipulated easily. You can even root the tips (runners) in another pot set below the runner producing plant (mother). There seems to be many things that you can do with the **Verti-Gro** pot that you can't do in the field or garden, mainly because you can control root temperature and it is easier to control certain diseases.

Note: Don't over-water during the winter. Strawberries require very little water and nutrients. Once per day may be sufficient during the short winter days with half strength solution. Foliar spray with organic seaweed and organic trace mineral solutions.

Short day commercial varieties are only available in quantities of 1,000 to 1,500 unless you can find a commercial grower or a catalog that sells smaller quantities. (Lassen Canyon Nursery in California (530) 223-1075 now sells some varieties in quantities of 100 at certain times of the year). These varieties produce from December through April in the field. However, in the **Verti-Gro** system, they produce earlier and later, sometimes through June depending on conditions, day length, etc... (Short day varieties are normally sold in the fall of each year) In the **Verti-Gro** system short day varieties may be carried over the summer in a non-producing stage and still bear very well the next year. You must keep them free of weeds, fungi and mites. Water as needed but no fertilizer.

Keep in mind that a strawberry plant is a perennial and that it will go dormant at some time. This depends on the variety. However, all varieties go dormant in the winter if not heated. Many varieties can be forced to go dormant in the summer and produce again the next fall or winter. June bearers go dormant in the summer and winter. Stressing the plant can force it into dormancy. To do this simply put the plant under stress by reducing the water and fertilizer. For example, a Sweet Charlie normally produces from December through April. In the **Verti-Gro** system allow it to produce as long as possible and then reduce the watering to a minimum and omit the fertilizer. The **Verti-Gro** pots can actually be moved from the stacks and placed in a different area, in a more dense location, fed on a minimal basis, moved back into the greenhouse or fed where they are (when fall comes, normally about September 21).

Almost anything can be grown successfully in vertical towers using hydroponic (“soilless”) methods. However, strawberries are one of the more difficult to grow because of the lack of a good supply of productive plants. Once you have the right variety, which has been delivered to you in good shape, the rest is easy in a **Verti-Gro** System. Timing is critical on ordering and purchasing strawberry plants. You can order plants from many suppliers or direct from **Verti-Gro, Inc.** However, plants are only available at certain times and in large quantities, so orders have to be combined. Order your plants early and set a time you want them delivered. Allow a range of 2-3 weeks. For example, order your plants in December for February delivery but allow for delivery from February 15 - March 7. This is the way to get the best plants at the best prices. For larger quantities (1000 or more) you can ask for a specific delivery date. For “**Day Neutral**” plants you should order in December or January for August or early September delivery. After early September some frozen varieties become too old and lose vigor. The leftovers are then thrown out and replaced with bare root varieties, and later these are replaced with another cycle of frigo (or refrigerated) plants.

Note: Strawberry plants should be ordered directly from plant producers or a strawberry grower. These strawberry plant producers and growers are professionals and their catalogs describe each variety. Check with each producer to see if the plant will produce berries the first year. Day neutral plants will but some June bearers, such as Jewel and Honey Eye will not produce, or will produce very little the first season.