Crown Division—A Means of Propagating Everbearing Strawberries

By

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EVERBEARING strawberries at the present time constitute only a small part of the strawberry industry in Oregon, relatively few growers attempting to grow them commercially. A few are grown commercially in the Willamette Valley, however, as well as east of the Cascade Range, where the bloom of spring-bearing varieties frequently is killed by spring frosts. There is considerable interest in everbearing strawberries for home gardens, recent reports indicating that everbearing varieties are well adapted to the Oregon coast regions.

EVERBEARING STRAWBERRIES PRODUCE FEW RUNNERS

Even under favorable conditions none of the good everbearing strawberry varieties are prolific runner-plant producers. This condition may be expected because the buds that form in the leaf axils develop into either runners or flower clusters, and occasionally into branch crowns. Varieties producing many flower clusters in the summer produce few runners.

The Rockhill probably produces the best fruit of any everbearing variety, but it is a very poor runner producer. Other varieties also produce few runner plants. For this reason some method of propagation other than depending upon runner plants as planting stock is desirable for Oregon conditions.

PLANTS INCREASED BY CROWN DIVISION

For several years growers of everbearing strawberries have been practicing crown division to increase their propagating stock. The method is rather simple and good results are secured if reasonable care is taken. Vigorous everbearing strawberry plants that produce few runners usually

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develop into plants with several crowns by winter. It is not uncommon for
the Rockhill variety to produce 10 to 15 strong crowns per plant. Plants
from which planting stock is to be made generally should not be more than
one year old nor have produced fruit for more than one season. Older
plants may be used but not as successfully as the younger stock.

METHOD OF CROWN DIVISION

Plants may be divided either by breaking the crowns apart with the
hands or by cutting them apart with the long blade of a knife. Usually is is
best first to cut the plant in two equal parts in order to get a better view of
the crowns and their roots.

Each individual crown should be cut or broken off so that a number of
roots are left attached to the crown, the more roots left the better, although
where care is exercised in handling and planting, plants with 5 to 10 roots
may be satisfactory. Use only the larger crowns that are half an inch or
more in diameter and at least half an inch long. Experiments have shown
that large crowns without any roots have made satisfactory growth if
proper care is given the stock for some time after planting.

PLANTING SUGGESTIONS

Plants obtained through crown division should not be allowed to dry
out. It is best not to make the crown divisions until just prior to planting,
although they may be held for some time if kept cool and reasonably
moist. It is very important that everbearing plants be set in the ground
early (February or March) so that they can establish a good set of roots
before warm weather occurs. If temperatures are warm at planting time
all fully expanded leaves should be removed and even if cool temperatures
prevail it is best not to leave too many leaves.

**Care is necessary when planting.** The most important point to remem-
ber is care in planting. Roots should be placed deep in the ground and the
soil packed tightly against roots and crown, the plants being set deeply
enough so that the soil completely surrounds the crown but does not cover
the leaves.

The soil should be loose and moist. Hard lumpy ground allows too
many large air spaces which dry out the roots and crowns. Planting early
while temperatures are cool gives the plant opportunity to make new roots
before losing too much water through the leaves.

Flower stalks should be removed as soon as they appear until the plant
is well established and growing vigorously, usually about July 1. Unless
plants are growing vigorously they will not give satisfactory yields during
a long period.

**Irrigation is usually needed.** Under most conditions in Oregon irriga-
tion is necessary to obtain satisfactory commercial production from ever-
bearing strawberries. Owing to the normally dry summers the soil usually
is very dry when everbearing varieties are fruiting and unless moisture can
be supplied to the plants production likely will be limited.