

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 it 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 remember 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 irrigation is necessary to obtain satisfactory commercial production from everbearing 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.