

JANUARY, 1941

CIRCULAR 203

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND APPLIED SCIENCE

MANHATTAN, KANSAS

DEPARTMENT OF HORTICULTURE



CHILDREN KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM

STRAWBERRY GROWING IN KANSAS¹

R. J. BARNDTT

The strawberry is one of the more important fruits of North America. High quality of fruit, large acreage and yields, wide adaptation, ease of culture, and great number of varieties all contribute to its popularity. Both the home gardener and the commercial grower successfully produce the strawberry in all agricultural sections of the continent except the tropics.

As would be expected, this fruit thrives in every part of Kansas where moisture and soil fertility are adequate for the support of agriculture. Home patches are found everywhere and commercial production on a limited scale is nearly equally extensive. In 1938 the area in Kansas planted to strawberries was 847 acres, a decrease

1. Contribution No. 167, Department of Horticulture.

of 50 percent since 1930. This loss was due to the droughts of 1934 and subsequent years and to the ravages of pests which attack drought-weakened plants. The average yield was 662 quarts to the acre, which is low and is generally exceeded by commercial growers. More than one-half of the commercial plantings of strawberries in Kansas is in Doniphan county though many other counties are well adapted to this fruit. Expansion in Wyandotte, Johnson, Shawnee and other counties will occur and will prove profitable when a period of normal rainfall returns. The quantity of this fruit produced in Kansas does not nearly supply local demands even during seasons of high yields, and a great extension in the acreage and a large increase in the yield per acre would not cause an overproduction of this fruit for home consumption. There is nearly always a demand for high-quality strawberries at a price which insures a profit to the grower.

VARIETIES OF STRAWBERRIES FOR KANSAS

Scores of varieties of strawberries have been carefully tested by the Agricultural Experiment Station at Manhattan and by growers in all parts of the state. These experiments have led to a practically unanimous selection of a small number of varieties as best adapted to the climate and soils of the state. Prominent in this list are *Excelsior*, *Dunlap*, *Howard*, *Aroma*, and the everbearing varieties, *Progressive*, *Mastodon*, and *Superb*. When a supply of water is available late in the strawberry season, the *Gandy* has many characteristics to recommend its addition to the list as a late berry, but early summer drouths greatly reduce the yield from this variety. Many new strawberry varieties have been distributed during the past eight years, especially those originated by workers in the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Some of these may in the future become leading commercial varieties, but lack of extensive tests, including that of time, prevents their being placed on this list of recommended varieties. *Blakemore*, *Fairfax*, *Dorsett* and others are in this group.

The amateur grower may wish to experiment with new varieties as they appear, and will get a great deal of enjoyment out of such tests. He should remember, however, that the price asked for plants of new varieties is often excessive and, though a few of these may be planted, the producing patch should be of the tried and recommended varieties.

Excelsior.—The qualities which give value to this variety are its very early season, its firmness of berry which insures good shipping quality, and its abundant production of runners. These good characters are in part offset by the small size and high acidity of the berries and the susceptibility of the plants to the leaf-spot

disease. The berries are oblate to round, of good red color, and rated as good in dessert quality when allowed to ripen on the plant. Excelsior ranks high among the early varieties.

Dunlap.—The Dunlap is one of the hardiest and most drouth-resistant varieties. These qualities, with its other good points of size, color, quality, productiveness, and disease resistance, place this variety well in the lead of all strawberries for the Northern Mississippi valley. Fortunately, it is a free producer of runners and thus is popular with the nurserymen. The fact that the flesh of the fruit is not very firm somewhat reduces its value for shipping and canning. It is a midseason berry in Kansas. (See illustration, page 1.)

Howard (Howard 17, Premier).—Howard is another midseason strawberry which is well adapted to Kansas. The plant is productive, a fair producer of runners, and healthy except for a tendency to develop “yellows.” The fruit is large and abundant, ripens over a long period and is good in color and quality. The flesh is firm. Howard is widely planted in Northeastern Kansas.

Aroma.—The Aroma originated in Kansas in 1889. It is a leading variety in the southern part of the Mississippi valley. Its season closely follows that of the Dunlap. Firmness of flesh and high dessert quality characterize the fruit of the Aroma. Other valuable qualities are bright crimson color, large size, healthy foliage, high yields, and good runner productions. It does especially well on rather heavy soils.

Gandy.—The middle Atlantic states produce the Gandy in large quantities. Its berries are large, firm, dark crimson in color, and of good quality. The plants are usually healthy and produce runners freely. This is one of the good canning varieties and, if grown in fertile clay soil, is productive. It can be recommended as a late variety for Kansas, but suffers some years from lack of soil moisture and from high temperature.

Progressive.—As an everbearing strawberry the Progressive is widely grown. It produces a light crop the same year it is planted, if conditions are favorable, and continues to yield until frost. The berries are small, firm, dark crimson in color, and very good in quality. The plant is resistant to leaf spot and will produce runners freely on rich soil. It is recommended for home gardens and might prove profitable as a commercial variety under intensive culture.

Superb.—The berry of Superb is larger than that of Progressive and is also somewhat softer, and lighter in color. It varies in quality from poor to good. It is superior to Progressive only in that it yields larger crops on soils which are low in nitrogen but well supplied with moisture.

Mastodon.— This variety, introduced in 1921, has become popular with growers of everbearing or autumn-bearing strawberries. It yields more plants than Progressive. Its fruits, medium to large in size, color unevenly to a medium red, are frequently hollow and are of good quality. The plant is susceptible to leaf spot and seems especially attractive to the leafroller. The place of the Mastodon, like other everbearing varieties, would seem to be in the home garden.

NUMBER OF VARIETIES TO PLANT

The home garden might well contain four or more good varieties, but the commercial grower usually finds one or two of them best adapted to his particular needs, and concentrates on these. In many parts of Kansas the Dunlap constitutes 50 to 100 percent of the commercial patch. It is probable, though, that 25, 50, and 25 percent each of three varieties arranged in order of ripening would be more profitable, especially for a local market. Excelsior, Dunlap, and Aroma would make a good combination. In some localities Howard may be substituted for either Excelsior or Dunlap. The hazard of the loss of a crop through frost injury is lessened and greater economy in picking is secured by this arrangement. This latter phase will be discussed in connection with harvesting the strawberry.

SITE FOR A STRAWBERRY PATCH

Air and Water Drainage.— A well-drained soil but one with good water-holding capacity is needed for strawberries. The soil in which this crop is grown must be free from standing water at all times of the year. The strawberry is unusually subject to injury by late spring frosts because of its early blooming habit and its clinging close to the surface of the ground where the coldest air collects during the night. Planting on a slope, which will afford good air drainage, will reduce this injury. However, soil conditions are usually more favorable on nearly level areas. Such land often is selected despite the frost hazard because the strawberry blossoms open in flushes over several weeks and any particular frost destroys only those blossoms which are then open. Strawberries are often used and have been recommended as an intercrop in a young orchard. If so used the rows of strawberries should not be closer than 8 feet from the tree rows to avoid injury to both crops, and liberal supplies of barnyard manure will be needed by the orchard trees after the strawberries are removed. A sloping site is shown in figure 1, where the plants are set as an intercrop in a young apple orchard.

Moisture Requirement.— The roots of the strawberry plants spread out close to the surface and do not penetrate very deeply. Hence the soil in which strawberries are grown should be well sup-

plied with water. It should be able to absorb large quantities of water and be retentive enough that brief droughts will not cause the surface soil to become dry. A soil which is rich in organic material best holds the moisture. Drought during harvest time or while new runner plants are setting rapidly is one of the worst things which can happen to the strawberry. Auxiliary irrigation often proves a profitable investment during years when such droughts occur. Either surface or overhead systems may be used. Sufficient water to wet the



FIG. 1.—Newly set strawberries used as an intercrop in a young orchard. No plants should be less than 8 feet from the apple trees.

soil thoroughly should be available. A one-inch irrigation of one acre will require about 27,150 gallons of water.

Soil Requirements.—Strawberries are found growing on all types of Kansas soils from light sand to heavy clay. In general, however, the lighter soils such as the sandy loams give the best yields. Sandy soils favor early ripening and are to be given preference on this account if their fertility and moisture content are adequate. The different varieties vary somewhat in their soil adaptations, but such variations are not marked. All varieties do well on fertile, moist, sandy loam soils.

It is in general much better practice to make the soil which is to be planted to strawberries fertile and productive before setting the plants than to attempt to increase the store of plant food greatly

after the patch is set. The addition of liberal amounts of barnyard manure to each of the two or three preceding crops and a proper crop rotation should take care of this matter.

Good tilth of the soil is as important as high fertility in growing strawberries. A soil which is hard to work, which bakes badly, or which absorbs water slowly is undesirable. The crop which precedes the strawberries will have an effect on soil texture. A fixed rule is that strawberries should follow a cultivated crop, never a cereal or grass because the cereal leaves the soil low in nitrogen, especially for fall planting, and grass land is usually infested by the white grub.

OBTAINING STRAWBERRY PLANTS

Like all fruit plants, strawberry varieties must be perpetuated by bud propagation. Fortunately, this plant naturally sets runners which, after they have taken root, may be severed from the mother plant and used for setting a new patch. Great care must always be taken, when more than one variety is grown, to make sure that the sets come from plants of the desired variety.

Propagating Plants.— For propagating purposes, maiden plants, that is, those which have not borne fruit of known variety, free from pests, and of good vigor should be planted on soil of high fertility. They should be set about 24 inches apart in the rows and 40 inches between rows. These special plants should have the best of care and be permitted to set as many runner plants as they will, but not allowed to bear any fruit. At transplanting time all the plants should be dug from the bed and those which have strong root systems, except the original mother plants, should be used to set the new patch. Available evidence does not sustain the popular idea that the late-set runner plants, those at the tip of the runner, are less valuable than the earlier-rooted ones. If a plant has a good root system it may be used regardless of its location on the runner.

Under favorable conditions, varieties such as the Dunlap will give an average production of 15 well-rooted sets to each mother plant. If, then, 1,500 plants were needed to set the new patch, the propagation bed should contain 100 mother plants and occupy somewhat less than 700 square feet of land.

Buying Plants.— Frequently, the grower will find it better to buy plants than to grow them. In that case he should select a reliable grower, order well ahead of planting time, and pay enough to obtain the best plants of the varieties desired. A good strawberry plant for setting will be of the preceding summer's growth, will have an abundance of light-colored roots, but few leaves, a slender neck or crown, and be free from disease or injurious insects. Dark brown roots, many old leaf stems causing a thick neck, and an abundance of leaves indicate an old plant; one that is of no value whatever to

set in a new patch. An old plant probably will not live if set. If it does live, it will make but a small production of runners, and is more likely to introduce pests than is a young plant.

Number of Plants Needed.—The number of plants needed to set the patch is easily calculated after the size of the proposed patch and the planting distances are determined. A one-acre patch contains 43,560 square feet. If the plants are to be set 20 inches apart with 48 inches between rows, each plant would occupy 6.6 square feet of land. Dividing 43,560 by 6.6, gives 6,600, the number of plants needed. A home patch 30 by 50 feet, or preferably 15 by 100 feet, would require 230 plants if set 20 by 48 inches.

STRAWBERRY ROTATIONS

Prevailing practices regarding the resetting of the same land to a second crop of strawberries and the number of years a patch is allowed to persist vary rather widely. It is never advisable to attempt to grow strawberries continuously on the same land. One of the best rotations is secured when strawberries occupy the land three years, yielding two crops, and are followed by other crops for an equal length of time before strawberries are reset. Longer intervals between the strawberry plantings probably would be better if well adapted land is abundant; but especially good care, including heavy manuring, may shorten the needed interval between crops to one year.

Some rotations found in practice are as follows: (1) Alfalfa four years, garden vegetables and manure one year, and strawberries for three years; (2) clover two years, early potatoes one year, followed by a cover crop and manure in the fall and spring-planted strawberries; (3) garden crops with liberal applications of manure two years, and strawberries; (4) clover two years, grain and potatoes each one year, then strawberries. Occasionally a grower will plow out the strawberry plants after the second or third harvest and attempt to get the soil into shape to replant the next spring, but this practice seldom proves successful.

Strawberries should never be planted on land which is foul with grass or weeds.

STRAWBERRY CULTURE

Preparation of the Soil.—The first requisite in securing a good patch of strawberries is thorough preparation of the soil. The soil should be plowed to a depth of six to ten inches and the furrow slice should be thoroughly pulverized. The plowing may be done either in the fall or in the spring. Thorough disking and harrowing and perhaps floating the surface is necessary to secure a well compacted soil, after which the land should be marked in rows and sometimes cross-marked for the plants.

Planting Distances.—The fertility and moisture supply of the soil, the method of training, whether hand or horse cultivation is used, and in a measure the variety selected, will influence planting distances. Rows are sometimes spaced as close as 24 inches and as far apart as 54 inches, but these extremes are rarely recommended. For Kansas soils of average fertility and moisture supply and in case horse-drawn implements are to be used, from 36 to 42 inches between rows are common planting distances under the hill system, and from 40 to 48 inches if the plants are to be grown in a matted row. Too close planting is a common mistake.

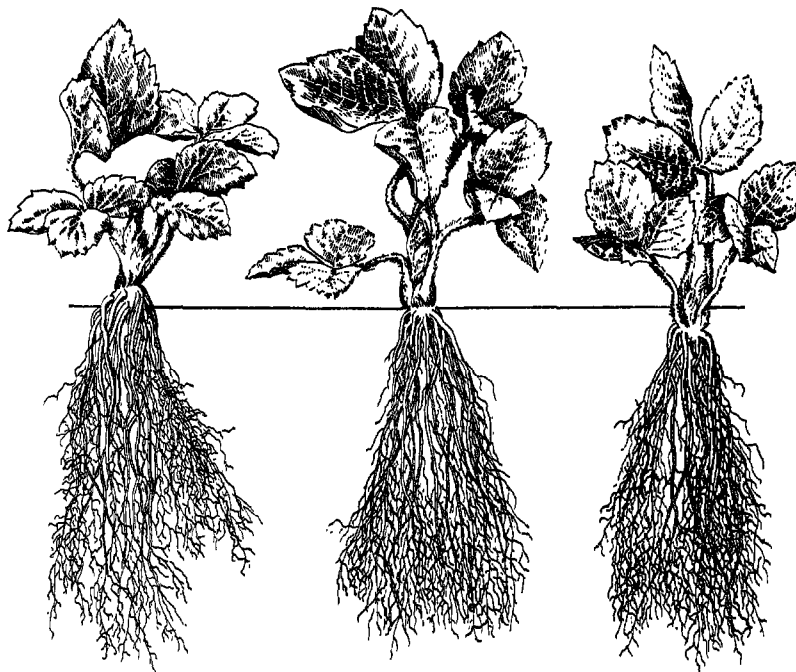


FIG. 2.—The middle drawing in this figure represents a strawberry plant set at the correct depth; the plant on the left is too shallow, and that on the right is too deep.

For hill culture the plants are commonly spaced 18 inches apart in the row. If the runners are allowed to grow and form a matted row the distance between plants is variable, usually from 12 inches to as much as 30 inches. Varieties which produce many runners may be planted at the greater distances, say 24 inches apart.

Care of the Plants.—The nurseryman ships plants just sufficiently well packed to reach their destination in good condition. The grower must, therefore, get them as soon as possible after their arrival. He should at once unpack the plants and water the roots

thoroughly. If the soil is ready, planting should be done at once, but if the weather is such as to prevent immediate setting the plants should be either stored in a cool place and kept moist or heeled in in some shaded spot. Strawberries are easy to transplant if reasonable care is given them, but exposure of the roots to wind and heat will quickly weaken the plants or kill them outright. Careful handling is very profitable.

When anything interferes with the setting of strawberry plants within 24 hours after receipt, they should be carefully heeled in. This process consists, first, of making a trench about six inches deep.



FIG. 3.—The leaf pruning illustrated may be done just before or just after the plant is set. One expanded leaf and one partly developed will utilize the water and nutrients absorbed by the roots of a newly set plant.

The bunches of plants are then opened and spread one plant thick against the firm, vertical side of the trench, every care being taken to keep the correct label with the plants. Fine, moist soil is then packed tightly against these plants, just covering the crowns. The process is then repeated until all the plants are heeled in when they should be well watered if necessary. So managed, strawberry plants can be held several days, but the delay, even under the best of care, will weaken the plants and will result in reduced vigor or in some loss when set in the bed.

Time of Planting.—In Kansas the best season for planting strawberries is early spring, usually March 15 to April 10. The soil should be in good physical condition, abundantly supplied with moisture, and cool. New runner set plants are sufficiently mature to set out in August, and plants set then may yield a small crop of berries and make good runner production the following spring. Too often though, August is too dry and hot for successful transplanting and a poor stand results. Spring planting is recommended even where irrigation water is available.

Setting the Plants.— Strawberry plants are set by hand or by machine. Three men or two men and a boy constitute an economical team for hand planting. One man, or the boy, drops the plants for the other two to set. In drying weather, not more than one or two plants should be dropped ahead of the setting team and the supply of plants must be so carried as to protect them from the wind and sun.

Various implements may be used for making the holes for the plants, but a flat dibble and a mason's trowel are among the best. The tool is thrust into the soil and then pressed forward. The roots of the plant are spread out in fan shape, having been previously trimmed to about four inches in length, and are inserted into the hole behind the tool, which is then withdrawn. The soil must be packed firmly around the roots and the depth of planting should be such that the crown of the plant is level with the surface of the packed soil. This rather exacting requirement is illustrated in figure 2. Either the planter's foot or the setting implement may be used to firm the soil. If the plant can be pulled out by a quick upward pull on one leaf, it has not been set firmly enough. The leaf stem should break.

Either just before or just after setting, part of the leaves should be removed from each plant. In general, the youngest expanded leaf should be left which with those just showing from the bud will initiate growth without too heavily taxing the root system. A pruned plant is shown in figure 3. Machine planting has proved economical and practical in large strawberry fields of northeastern Kansas.

Training Systems.— Nearly all Kansas strawberries are grown by the matted-row system. Under this method the newly set plants are allowed to produce and set runners at will throughout the first summer's growth. The following year's crop is borne from these runner set plants and the yield will be more closely related to the care given them and their vigor than to the kind of season, barring frost injury during the fruiting period. One plant to each 36 square inches constitutes a good stand in the matted row, the row

itself being 12 to 14 inches wide. Experience shows too that the best berries are produced on the plants which took root rather early the preceding summer. Later rooted plants, on the edges of the matted row, do not bear so well but are better plants to use in setting a new bed. The matted-row system is well illustrated in figure 4, though the plants there stand somewhat too thick.

If the hill system of training is adopted the newly set plants are allowed to produce neither runners nor blossoms the first season. This concentrates the growth of the plants in a series of offsets or

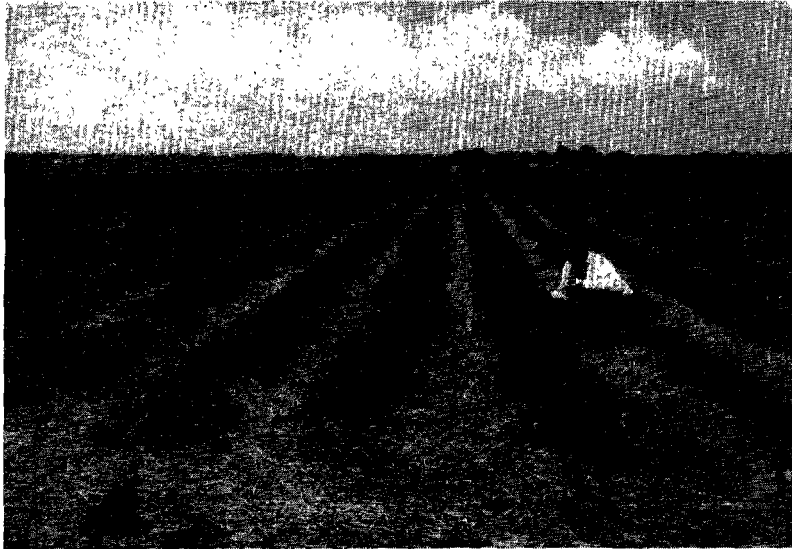


FIG. 4.—A splendid Kansas strawberry field at picking time.

crowns around the original plant. From these the first crop is produced. Some growers claim that the hill system gives better yields in dry sections than does the matted row, but it is not generally popular. It might well be tested in the home garden patch.

Various "hedge-row" or "spaced-row" systems are used in some parts of the country but are in general disfavor because of their high labor requirement. To follow them requires the actual placing of each runner plant in its position in the row and the removal of all surplus runners.

Cultivation of the Soil.—Beginning at once after the plants are set, the strawberry field should have frequent cultivations throughout the growing season. These may at first be close to the row and as much as four inches deep, but should allow more space for the row and become more shallow as the season advances. Some hand work

may be necessary to keep the weeds and grass out of the rows, but the principal part of this is better accomplished by careful cultivation and rotation of crops during the years preceding the setting of the patch.

Ordinary implements such as the disk, five-shovel cultivator, and spike-tooth cultivator may be used. Care must be exercised at all times to avoid injury of the roots of the plants or leaving roots exposed by a furrow along the edge of the row. During a season of normal rainfall the strawberry patch will need to be both cultivated and hoed 6 to 10 times. Destruction of all weeds while they are small and the maintenance of a loose, friable surface soil in which the new plants can easily establish themselves are the objects of this cultivation.

The cultivation during subsequent years is usually delayed until after harvest, especially when the straw mulch is left between the rows. In unmulched patches the cultivation should begin early. Thorough cultivation is always needed following renovation and until a good supply of runner plants have set. Cultivation close to the plants must always be shallow.

Fertilization. — It is a matter of general agreement among both experiment station workers and growers that the best time to enrich the soil for strawberries is during the two or three years before the plants are set out and this should be done by building up the organic content of the soil. However, good results have sometimes followed the use of nitrogenous fertilizers after the plants are set. Favorable times for their application are during the period of plant setting the first season and following renovation the second season. Such applications are harmful when made in the spring because they stimulate heavy plant growth at the expense of fruit bearing. Fruit of large size but of poor color and soft texture will result and time of ripening will be delayed. Lime is not needed for the strawberry plants, as they are adapted to a rather wide range of soil reaction, but may be valuable for the legume used in the rotation.

The Winter Mulch. — Good growers place a mulch of hay or straw on the strawberry bed during early December. The principal purpose of the mulch is to prevent heaving of the soil and the consequent breaking of the roots of the plants. The layer of straw should be four to six inches thick when applied. It must be raked off the plants as soon as leaf growth starts in the spring. Usually, part of the mulch should be taken from the field at this time but the greater part is left between the rows until after harvest, when it is nearly all removed. Some of the straw can be cultivated into the soil if the soil moisture is abundant.

In addition to preventing heaving, the mulch is of value in conserving moisture, controlling weeds, keeping the berries clean, re-

ducing the frost hazard and winter injury, and making picking conditions more pleasant. About five tons of wheat straw per acre are needed. It should be free from weed seeds. Baled straw can usually be purchased for mulching the small home patch, but should be thoroughly torn to pieces when applied. One bale will be adequate.

Renewal or Renovation of the Patch.—Immediately following harvest the strawberry patch must be renewed or renovated if it is to produce a second crop. This cultural process may involve four steps, which should be taken as follows: First, the mulch is removed,



FIG. 5.—The first step in renovating a strawberry field which did not require cutting and burning the leaves is shown here. The left margin of the row will be saved for making new plants.

only such quantities as may be incorporated in the soil readily being left between the rows. Second, if a pest such as leaf spot or leaf-roller is present the leaves are mowed, allowed to dry, and then burned when a brisk breeze is blowing. Third, the rows are cut down with some implement to a width of about four inches. Fourth, the patch receives cultivation at seven- to ten-day periods for two or three months. The cutting back of the row can be done with a stirring plow and a rolling cutter attachment, as illustrated in figure 5.

Some successful growers merely straighten up one edge of the matted row, say the left, and plow away from the right side till only the desired width is left. This brings the left half of the new row on soil not previously occupied by the strawberry plants. The strip

of row left should be about four inches wide and, if the cutting back is done with a plow, the soil should be cultivated back into the furrows as soon as practicable. Some of the plowed-out plants may start to grow, too, if surface cultivation is not commenced at once. A newly renovated patch is shown in figure 6.

The plants in the strip of row which is left should quickly begin to produce runners. These are allowed to establish themselves until the matted row is again 12 to 14 inches wide. Shallow cultivation of the space between rows and hand weeding are continued until fall.

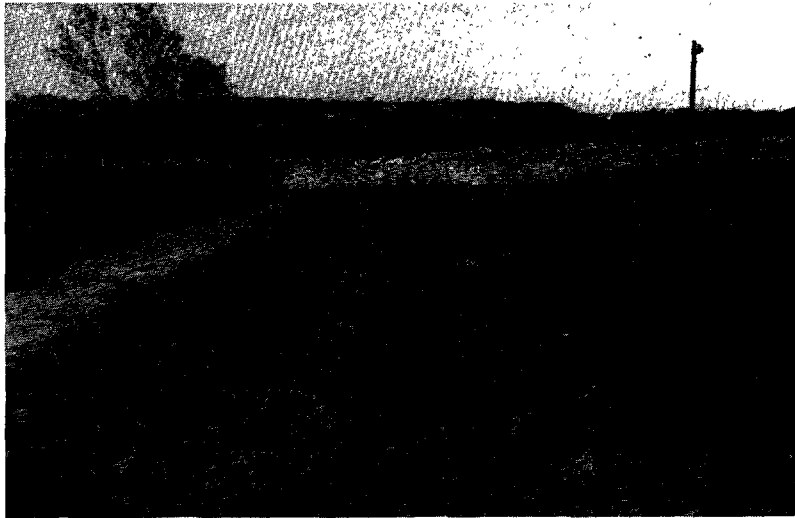


FIG. 6.—After plowing, the soil has been disked and harrowed. Fewer plants in the rows would probably yield better runners for the second crop.

Irrigation of Strawberries.—In the Eastern part of Kansas the yield of strawberries can be increased greatly by irrigation in some seasons, while in Western Kansas irrigation is needed nearly every year. The water may be applied in furrows between the rows or by an overhead sprinkler system. The former is much cheaper to install but the latter, possibly, is more economical to operate.

There are two times of the year when droughts are particularly harmful to the strawberry. The first of these is while the crop is maturing. Depending on the type of soil, the patch needs three to six inches of water during this period. The second period of special water demand comes just after the patch is renovated. The water is then used to produce new runner plants for the second crop and to enable these new plants to store an abundance of food in their crowns for the beginning of growth the following spring. Sufficient

water should be given to keep the plants growing vigorously through the latter part of July and August. This is also the period during which the everbearing varieties must have a liberal supply of water if the fall crop is to be abundant.

INSECT PESTS OF THE STRAWBERRY

With the exception of three or four insects, strawberries in Kansas have few pests of this type.

The white grub of the May or June beetle is sometimes destructive in strawberry patches, the injury being caused by the grubs feeding on the roots of the plants. Strawberries should not be planted on infested ground or ground which was in grasses or weeds the previous season.

The strawberry leaf-roller injures the foliage of the plants during June and midsummer. The best spray for control of this pest is one-half pint of 40 percent sulfate of nicotine plus one quart of summer oil emulsion to 50 gallons of water. The dilution in one gallon of water is one tablespoonful nicotine sulfate plus four tablespoonfuls of summer oil emulsion. As soon as the insects appear on the lower side of the leaves the first application should be made, taking care to apply the spray from below. Two additional sprays at five-day intervals should give control. This spray will not injure blossoms or fruit but is not effective after the leaves are folded.*

The strawberry crown borer is a small, footless, white grub which feeds on the side of the crowns and weakens or kills the plants. A definite crop rotation should be adopted. New beds should be placed some distance from infested ones. Plants in the infested field which is to be abandoned should be plowed under as soon as the crop is picked. The new plants should be taken from clean or uninfested fields early in the spring. New plants should not be secured from places where the season is two weeks or more in advance of that where the plants are to be grown. This is not important with early season shipments of plants.

DISEASES OF THE STRAWBERRY

Leaf spot is the most serious disease of the strawberry and is found in all parts of Kansas. This disease appears in the form of small, irregularly distributed spots on the leaves. The spots are at first reddish-brown or purple; later the center becomes grayish-white with a red or purple border. Plants on heavy or wet soils are most subject to attacks of leaf spot and varieties differ in their degree of susceptibility to it.

Bordeaux mixture, 4-4-50 strength, applied twice before harvest

* Lamerson, P. G. and Parker, R. L. Control of the American Strawberry Leaf-roller. Biennial Report of the Kansas State Horticultural Society XLV. pp. 89 and 181.

and once after renovation is of value in the control of leaf spot, Mowing and burning the leaves after harvest also lessens later infections. Care should be taken to set no infected plants when the new patch is started.

Powdery mildew, black mold, and gray mold are sometimes of economic importance as strawberry diseases in this region. If they appear, directions for their control can be obtained from the Agricultural Experiment Station.

HARVESTING STRAWBERRIES

Picking Equipment.—If the strawberry is grown in commercial quantities, preparation for harvest must be considered before the fruit begins to ripen. A supply of crates and boxes or cups should

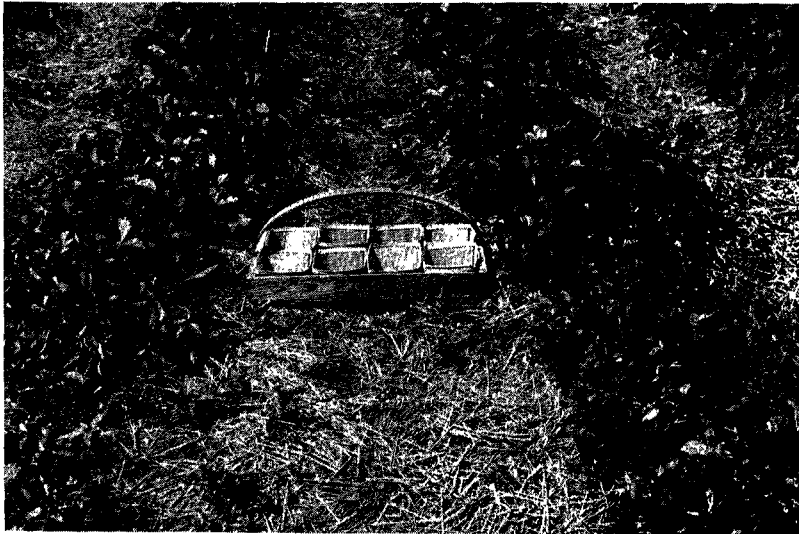


FIG. 7.—An eight-cup picking carrier ready to be filled.

be obtained as soon as a fairly accurate estimate of the crop can be made. Records of previous crops or of those grown by neighbors serve as a guide in making this estimate. The crates and cups should be of good grade and workmanship, clean and new. Prices of crates vary from year to year and always seem high, but these supplies are necessary if the fruit is to go on the general market, and it pays to use good ones. Both crates and cups are frequently made up after being hauled to the patch as shook.

At least one picking carrier should be provided for each picker. These should carry six to twelve cups and should be provided with handles. An eight-cup picking carrier is illustrated in figure 7.

The Packing Shed.—The berries must be protected from the sun and wind while being packed and while the crate covers are being nailed on. This protection may be afforded by a simple shelter of rough boards, or a more elaborate shed may be built. It should be located near the center of one side of the patch, and is well worth the small amount which it costs. A good type of packing shed and standard shipping crates are shown in figure 8.

Secure Labor Early.—As soon as an accurate estimate of the crop can be made, steps should be taken to secure a supply of pickers. Children over 14 years of age can harvest strawberries satisfactorily

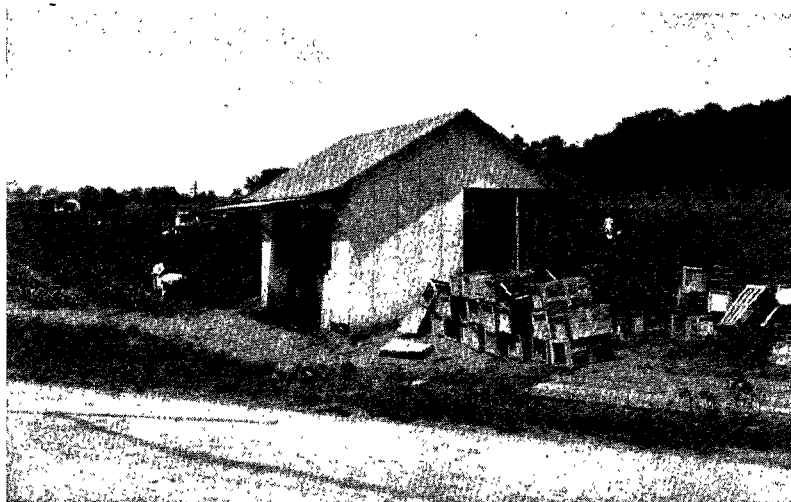


FIG. 8.—A convenient packing shed. This shed is by a paved highway and hundreds of crates of berries are sold direct through it to the consumer.

if under competent supervision. Some large growers secure the children's school teacher as a forewoman and have found the results excellent. City women and children are sometimes available if good, sanitary camping quarters are provided for them. In general, strawberry picking is piece work.

Training Pickers.—The number of pickers needed will vary from four to eight for each acre. They should be numerous enough to get over the patch at least once in 48 hours, but yet enable the pickers to put in as nearly full time as possible. A good distribution of pickers is shown in figure 9. The whole place should be a "School of Pickers" during the first few days of harvest. Full instructions must be given regarding the stage of ripeness or color to look for, clean picking, picking by the stem instead of by grasping the berry,

sorting while picking, and many other details of the operation. Pickers not doing good work by the third day should be replaced.

If a given acreage is planted to three varieties which ripen in succession, a smaller and better-trained picking crew can be employed for a longer harvest season. Each grower can follow this method, or that of concentrating on one variety and thus having a short and hurried harvest, as appears best to him, being guided largely by the demands of his market.

Packing the Berries.—In many sections even the strawberries shipped to the general market are not packed. They are merely



FIG. 9.—A picking crew at work in a Kansas strawberry patch. This crew can pick about five acres of berries.

graded as to ripeness by the top berries of the cup and the crates at once nailed up. Other growers will go to the other extreme and pack each individual berry according to a definite system. This pays only when large-size, high-grade berries are produced and can be sold on a market which will pay considerably more than the usual price. More commonly, only the top layer of berries in each cup is arranged or packed. This consists in so facing each box with representative fruits that no stems show, thus giving the package a neat appearance. Pickers can be taught to pick into two cups at once, placing ripe berries which must be used quickly in one and less ripe but mature berries in the other.

SHIPPING AND MARKETING THE STRAWBERRY

Strawberries are usually shipped by express or by truck. They should have been picked at the state of ripeness adapted to the shipping distance which the fruit must travel. The fruit may be full color but not soft for a 12-hour shipment, three-fourths red for a 24-hour shipment, and white in color for longer shipments. For home use they should be full red and ripe but not soft when picked.

Marketing Methods. — Strawberries are sold on either the local or the general market. Association selling has proved profitable in many commercial districts, especially where the fruit is shipped in car lots; in fact some type of cooperation is necessary if a large quantity of strawberries produced in one locality is to be sold profitably on the general market during a season of average production.

Individual commercial growers, especially those isolated from other growers, often sell at profitable prices on local markets. Under these conditions, arrangements may be made with local retail stores to handle the fruit or, through advertising, considerable quantities may be sold at the farm gate. The writer knows one grower who disposed of a large crop from more than an acre of berries by the sole means of a sign at the gate. His house, however, was situated on a paved highway. Frequently, the selling of the crop will require as much study and ingenuity as will the growing and harvesting. It is also true with this fruit as with others that well-grown and well-packed fruit is already half sold.

PROCESSING THE STRAWBERRY

Although housewives in this country have processed the strawberry ever since the crop was harvested wholly from wild plants, it has not been in high favor as either a canned or a preserved fruit. During recent years freezing of fruits and vegetables has been widely tested as a method of preservation and has proved successful with this fruit. When properly done, much of the original flavor and aroma is retained though the physical structure of the thawed fruit is less attractive than the fresh strawberry. Only sound, ripe, thoroughly washed berries should be frozen.

The Howard, among varieties commonly grown in Kansas, behaved best under freezing according to tests made by the Agricultural Experiment Station. Dunlap and Aroma ranked good, but were rather soft in texture when thawed. The best containers for frozen strawberries were water-proof pasteboard cartons of pint or quart size. Wide-mouth glass jars served well although the first cost was high.

Whole or sliced strawberries may be frozen dry or sugar may be added before freezing. A common formula is two parts of the fruit

to one part sugar. Small or poorly shaped strawberries make a nice jam or are satisfactory to place on a sundae if crushed with sugar before freezing. When properly prepared and frozen, the strawberry can be held in a storage locker six or more months.

SOME PRECAUTIONS FOR THE NEW STRAWBERRY GROWER

Locate the strawberry patch on fertile soil which contains an abundance of organic material.

Clean the land of weeds, especially grasses, before setting the plants.

Do not undertake a large acreage until experience has been gained with smaller patches. Profits do not always increase at the same rate as the acreage.

Select only thoroughly tested varieties for commercial planting.

Reject for planting all plants which are old, diseased, or weak.

Do not allow spring set plants to bear fruit the first season.

Destroy a patch which is declining in production, usually immediately after the second crop is harvested.

Practice a rotation which includes a legume for two years and in which the strawberries are preceded by a cultivated crop.

Remember that good renovation methods will greatly increase the next crop.

Provide for a supply of containers and pickers before the berries begin to ripen.

Study the methods of successful growers in your neighborhood.

Keep records of costs and sales.

Only sound, ripe strawberries should be placed in the freezer-locker.

PRINTED BY KANSAS STATE PRINTING PLANT
W. C. AUSTIN, STATE PRINTER
TOPEKA 1940

18-6400

