

Growing Small Fruits Up North

Some Benefits

1. Easy crop to grow
2. Very good for the health
3. Can withstand a little neglect - quite forgiving
4. Will greatly reward you when shown a little attention

Placement

Most fruits prefer full sun (tolerating light shade) and fertile loamy, well drained soil. For all edible plants we recommend adding soil activator (humates) in order to release locked up nutrients in the soil, and to improve the flavor of the edible parts.

Asparagus

A couple of decades ago the Jersey hybrids came out making it possible for everyone to grow the big hefty spears (not just the few gardeners in the know). Super health benefits - many cancer survivors swear by it.

Bed Preparation

Plant them in full sun with lots of organic matter tilled/dug in deeply. The PH-level must be over 6.0 - thus pour in the lime and add 20 lbs of a 10-20-10 per 1,000 sq ft Use corn gluten and bark for weed control. The more preparation the better. It is a 25 year crop (that's also why it is planted deep). You can add some lettuce and radishes the first couple of years between the plants.

Harvest

Start harvesting the second year and by the third year you will start getting the largest shoots.

Sayings

"The marriage will last when the couple plants asparagus."

Brambles (Raspberries and Blackberries)

For the biggest and best fruit prepare the soil well with peat, bagged cow manure, gypsum and lime. Also use corn gluten and bark mulch for weed control. Remember that good soil fertility makes weeding easier. Cut back dead canes in late March/early April when you see the canes turn gray in color. Ever-bearing varieties fruit on new and old canes. Most people cut down the fall bearing varieties in early spring. They fruit on new canes only.

Black Raspberry

if you want to have fun - grow them on a wire trellis. Maybe even one you lay down in the winter.

Thorn-free Blackberry

Yes you can even weed these without wearing a leather jacket! Plant them 2 feet apart. They need heavy mulching and maybe even lay them down up here - but it is well worth the effort!

Currants and Gooseberries

Good drainage is essential. Try raised beds or above grade planting if necessary. Check our [planting guide](#). Compost and mulch work wonders. Very little work involved with these

bushes! They have few problems with insects or diseases. Black currants have a strong odor that seem to repel deer. Space them about 5-6 feet so you can pick easily.

Do currants need a pollinator?

No, they are self-fertile. Cross-pollination is not necessary. However they produce a larger crop if other varieties are planted close by.

Black Currants

Great fragrance and excellent for jelly. Use fresh or frozen.

Red Currants

Excellent for preserves. Both currants are easy to pick - just get the whole cluster in your hand and gently pull.

Gooseberries

A little fight with soft thorns but worth it.

Grapes

As much or little work as you want to put into them. It rewards either way. Some kind of pergola, trellis or fence is necessary.

Anything need to be done in order to enable grapes to overwinter?

- Zone 3 varieties (Beta and Valiant) can remain standing through the winter.
- Zone 5 seedless (Reliance and Swenson Red) are a lay down up here. Cover the vine with mulch or earth - it is worth every minute you put into it!

If you mulch in the area, don't mulch all the way up to the main trunk - rodents might dig some winter hole too close to it and start gnawing on it.

Necessary to prune grapes in our area? If so, how?

- Yes.
- Wait until February/March in order to see if the grape vine or which parts have survived the winter.
- Remove all deadwood and basal shoots.
- Remove all branches until the first wire, except for maybe one shoot at the very base (as a replacement).
- Choose 4-7 fruit canes (smooth and tan bark) that grow along the supporting wire. Fruit canes that received the previous year full sun will perform best! The buds simply love full sun!
- Shorten the chosen fruit canes, so that there are about 10 buds per new cane. (Have around 40 per grape vine.)
- Also leave 2-3 spurs (replacement canes with 2 buds at the first wire).
- Each shoot will need about 14-16 leaves to ripen a cluster.
- Pruning will remove about 70% of the whole grape and is the key to producing grapes.



Kniffen system

Strawberries

Strawberries like good drainage (sandy loam). If your soil is heavy consider raised beds. For maximum production plant them 12-18 inches apart. If you have problems with grassy weeds use Poast chemical grass killer in large beds (kills only the grass). For small beds improve the fertility and use corn gluten as a pre-emergent herbicide. It makes pulling easy!

How to produce a top-quality strawberry crop?

Heavy producer: June-bearer strawberry

- Plant in early spring.
- Till the soil fairly deeply to be sure that the strawberries won't get any wet feet.
- Amend the soil with peat and garden compost. Don't use too much manure, since it is salty. Work ½ lb of 10-10-10 into the soil.
 - ◆ 1st year: ½ lb of 10-10-10 per 1,000 sq ft in July and August as side-dressing
 - ◆ 2nd year: 1-2 lbs of 10-10-10 per 1,000 sq ft in July and August as side-dressing
- The pH-level should be around 5.5-6.5. Plant in sandy & gravelly, loamy soil. (Plants don't 'bake' as quickly in it, and the soil is easily worked.)
- Avoid planting strawberries in soil that has been used for tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants or peppers within the last 3 years, because of verticillium rot.
- Plant on a cloudy day or late in the afternoon.
- Strawberry-rows should be 2.5-3 ft apart - the plants should be 18-24 inches apart.
- Let the runners of each plant connect to the next, so that they form one continuous row. Thereafter pinch all runners, and till the space in-between the rows (matted row).
- Drip-irrigate the rows with 1 inch of water per 7-10 days; watering from above is also okay, but it increases the chance of fungus or other disease.
- Mulch in-between the rows with a layer of 3 inches of straw.
- A row of 10 ft and 20 in wide should produce a crop of 5-10 quarts.
- A planted row will last between 3-5 years. Commercial growers replace every row every 2 years.

Our Motto

If your plants and fruits are not 20% larger than the book suggests, then you have more soil improvement to do! And for the adventurous gardeners - a quote from university professors at the Northern Green Expo winter meetings on climate change, "Assume a plant is hardy unless you have personally killed it yourself!"