



NEWS RELEASE

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RENOVATE YOUR STRAWBERRY PATCH FOR MORE BERRIES NEXT YEAR

Do you renovate your strawberry patch each year? If not, do it this year and you may be surprised at how much this step increases your yield and plant health next year! This is good advice from Annie Klodd, University of Minnesota Extension Fruit and Vegetable Production Educator. She shares the following recommendations for taking care of your strawberry beds now that picking is over with.

After the final harvest, the patch should be renovated in order to restore the health of the plants and prepare them for the following season. This process involves weed control, mowing, row narrowing, cultivation, fertilization and irrigation.

Step 1: Remove large, mature weeds

Because Step 2 of the renovation process will involve mowing the whole patch, any large weeds that are about to go to seed should be removed prior to mowing so that they don't spread their seeds into the soil. I find that weeds are often easier to pull when they are larger compared to when they've been mowed — there is more to grab onto. Most home gardeners will accomplish this step with hand-pulling.

Step 2: Mowing

After removing big weeds, the next step is mowing everything. Mow over all of the plants to stimulate new growth that will be healthier and more vigorous.

Mature plants should be mowed about 1 inch above the crowns (base of the plants). If the soil is an uneven height, then adjust the mower height up in order to avoid hitting the crowns.

Note: Plants that were planted this year do not need to be mowed.

Cautions about mowing:

- If the plants are stressed from drought, mowing may damage them further because the stressed plants have reduced ability to produce new leaves. If you garden in a drought-stressed area of the state and have not been watering regularly, either consider skipping the mowing or irrigate a couple of times prior to mowing to reduce stress on the plants.
- Do not delay renovation. If renovation is delayed by more than a few weeks after harvest, mowing is no longer advised.

Step 3: Apply fertilizer or compost

After mowing, broadcast a nitrogen-containing fertilizer, or a fertilizer containing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (N-P-K). This can be applied in the form of granulated or pelleted fertilizer, or compost. If applying fertilizer, it is helpful to apply part of it now, and part of it 4 to 6 weeks later, to make sure the plants have access to nitrogen throughout the rest of the season.

Deciding how much fertilizer to apply:

Sandier soils do not retain nitrogen as well as heavier soils with more silt and clay. Gardeners with sandier soils should apply higher rates of fertilizer and apply it at two timings as described above.

Doing a soil and foliar test will help determine if your strawberry plants are deficient in any nutrients. It is not the right time in the season now to do a foliar test, but it can be done in a few weeks and be used next season.

Step 4: Cultivate the soil between the rows

While some gardeners have large patches of strawberries with no rows, having rows of straw between the strawberry rows helps prevent the plants from crowding each other out and becoming unproductive. During renovation, till up the soil between the rows so the rows do not grow into each other. Remove any additional runners that are growing between the rows if they are not removed by tilling or hoeing.

More fruit is produced along the sides of the rows compared to the centers, so narrower rows are more productive. Not only does this step narrow the rows, but it also incorporates fertilizer and straw, and removes small weeds between the rows. The rows should be narrowed to 12 to 18 inches.

Step 6: Watering

The plants need water at this point to re-grow their leaves and access the fertilizer that was applied. Watering is especially important after renovation if conditions have been dry and the forecast does not call for much rain in the coming week.

Step 7: Keep the patch happy!

After renovation is complete, keep watering and pulling weeds for the next few weeks so the plants can grow without competing for nutrients, water and space.

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