Maintaining strawberry beds

Growing your own fruits and vegetables can be a rewarding experience for both novice and seasoned gardeners. There’s nothing quite like the taste of a fresh fruit or vegetable right off the vine … especially strawberries.

Although strawberry plants are perennial, they’re most productive within their first five years. They conveniently send out runners that become new plants. Fortunately, with a little bit of yearly maintenance, they will likely bear fruit for much longer. This is why it’s important to keep the beds renovated, which is simply narrowing the strawberry rows and controlling weeds after fruit harvest. Renovation prepares the bed for the next growing season.

Strawberry beds should be renovated after harvest because this is when the plants go into a semi-dormant stage. To begin the process, weed the bed. Although the bed should be weeded all year long, it’s even more important when you’re ready to renovate. Plants will have an easier time becoming established if they aren’t competing with weeds for water and nutrients. Be sure to remove any diseased berries. However, don’t throw diseased berries or foliage in your compost pile.

Gardeners can mow the old foliage by setting the mower at its highest setting, but leave about an inch or two of stem above the crowns. This process works well for beds that are ground level. Use lopping shears for strawberry beds grown in raised planters. Be careful not to scalp the crowns of the plants, which is the growing point of the plant.

Next, cultivate between the rows to narrow the width of the row to about 10 to 12 inches. After cultivating, thin out the plants if they’ve grown in too densely. Leave the largest, healthiest looking plants and thin to a spacing of about 3 to 4 inches between plants. Destroy any diseased plants you remove.

Next, apply fertilizer to the bed. A soil test through your local Oklahoma State University Extension office will provide you information regarding how much fertilizer you’ll need to apply. The general recommendation is two to three pounds of 10-10-10 balanced fertilizer per 100 feet of row. This single application should be sufficient to sustain summer growth and allow the plants to set flowers and fruit buds for next season’s crop.

With temperatures rising, it’s a good time to lay out straw as mulch to preserve soil moisture and to keep the soil cool.
For those growing ever-bearing varieties, renovation isn’t necessary. Simply narrow the rows once your fall harvest is complete.