

Strawberries: To Renovate or Not to Renovate, Who Cares?

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It is fall, and I'm writing about strawberry renovation. Bad timing? I don't think so. This is a good time to look at your fields and pat yourself on the back for a job well done, or grumble that you wished you had done your renovation.

Immediately after harvesting June-bearing strawberries, growers renovate their strawberry beds, usually by mid-July. Renovation entails mowing off the old foliage, narrowing the rows and getting rid of runners in the walkway, getting rid of weeds and fertilizing.

The reasons for each step are important and necessary for healthy plants and high quality yield the following year.

- Mowing off the old foliage. During the growing season foliar diseases, such as the many fungal leaf spots and bacterial angular leaf spot, attack the plants reducing functional leaf surface. This won't kill the plants but does have the potential to reduce yield. Mowing removes the diseased foliage, shredding it for rapid decomposition which results in reduced inoculum for the following season. It also knocks down foliar insect pests including mites. Importantly, this practice encourages new vegetative growth, opens up the plant to better sunlight penetration for flower bud formation. It is important to avoid hitting the crown with the



Renovated strawberry bed in early fall.

mower. The crown is the heart of the strawberry plant where new runners and flower stalks are produced.

- Narrowing the rows.

Till or cultivate to narrow the row to 8" - 12". This also has the benefit of putting additional soil up around the plant crown resulting in improved



Non-renovated strawberry bed.

root development. Remove runners that have moved into the walkway or, if there are spaces that need to be filled, move some of the runners back into the plant row. It also provides for ample room between rows for walkways, with rows narrow enough to provide the ability to reach berries without stepping on the plants.

- Get rid of weeds. Weeds within and between the rows harbor insects such as the Tarnished plant bug – a destructive strawberry pest. Weeds reduce air flow for rapid drying after a rain or dew leading to an increase in foliar and berry diseases which results in a reduced marketable crop. Pickers, whether they are your pickers or pick-your-own customers, don't want to have to hunt through weeds for the plants or the berries. Ever seen a weedy strawberry field and wondered where, or even if, there are any viable plants in the mess, let alone marketable berries? Weeds will also out-compete the strawberry plant for valuable water and nutrients resulting in reduced yield. Flower bud formation is dependent on sunlight – weeds block valuable sunlight strawberry plants need

- Fertilizing. Give the plants a needed boost as they put on new growth and develop flower buds.
- Irrigation is very important if rain is lacking during this period to help move the nutrients into the plant, to promote new growth, to promote flower bud formation that occurs during the late summer and early fall, to maintain healthy plants and replace water lost during the heat of the summer.

If you didn't renovate your strawberries this year, I hope this information will make you pause and re-think that decision next year for healthier plants, higher yields and an increase in your profits.



Fungal leaf spot.

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