

Fragaria × *ananassa* A.N. Duchesne

Strawberry

Other Common Names: Commercial Strawberry, Cultivated Strawberry, Garden Strawberry.

Family: *Rosaceae*.

Cold Hardiness: Strawberries are useful as perennials in USDA zones 5 to 8, but are more typically utilized as cool season annuals in zones 9 and 10.

Foliage: Evergreen to semi-evergreen; alternate on tightly compressed rosettes or at the end of stoloniferous runners; trifoliate; 4 to 6 across; leaflets 2 to 4 long; broadly ovate to obovate; tips broadly acute to rounded, except for the serrations; bases are cuneate and margins dentate-serrate; most cultivars are dark glossy green and glaucous above and lighter and duller beneath with adpressed whitish hairy pubescence; petioles 4 to 8 long, dark to medium green in color and hairy.

Flower: Although variable in size, $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ in diameter, the five-petaled flowers are borne mostly below the foliage in small five to fifteen flower cymose clusters borne on leafless scapes; petals are mostly white, rarely pink, and pretty but typically hidden from view by the foliage; thus the flowers provide minimal ornamental effect unless viewed from the side or beneath as in hanging baskets or strawberry pots.

Fruit: The fruit is the commercial strawberry; botanically it is an aggregate of exposed tiny tan to brown achenes partially embedded on the surface of a swollen red receptacle; the $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 long fruits are initially hard and greenish white, then green, and eventually red, soft, and fragrant when ripe; fruit are not only edible, but delicious; you will have to fight the critters to enjoy these fruits as they are a favorite of about every form of wildlife known to inhabit our region.

Stem / Bark: Stems — green; pubescent; stoutish rosettes or longer, thinner, stiffer stoloniferous runners; Buds — foliose; green; pubescent; Bark — not applicable.

Habit: Like other members of the genus *Fragaria*, *F.* × *ananassa* grows from a central cluster of rosette-like foliage and spreads by means of stoloniferous runners that root where the tips contact the soil, eventually forming a mat-like groundcover of variable density; mature heights are 6 to 8 (10); the overall texture is medium to medium-coarse.

Cultural Requirements: Although grown as herbaceous perennials in cooler climates, they function most efficiently as annuals in our region; fall planting works in South Texas, whereas late winter to early spring is best in North Texas; spring planting with the primary harvest a year later in the following spring works in milder climates; avoid heavy clay or saline soils by planting Strawberries in raised beds; full sun to afternoon shade is acceptable; planting depth is critical as too deep will rot the crown, whereas shallow planting encourages root dessication; irrigation will be required, even during the winter in western and extreme southern portions of our region; mulching will reduce dessication and disease from soil splash; the key to successful culture is to use only the best quality, virus-free, nematode-free stock from a reputable supplier.

Pathological Problems: Nematodes can be problematic on sandy soils; leaf spots, mites, viruses, slugs, and pill bugs can be production challenges; salt damage can be a problem in areas with saline soils or irrigation water.

Ornamental Assets: Strawberries sport a low colonizing growth habit, rich lustrous dark glossy green leaves, white to pink flowers, and of course colorful delicious edible fruits.

Limitations & Liabilities: The pubescence on the foliage is scratchy and can be a dermal irritant to susceptible people; scavenging animals can damage plantings; plants are short-lived in hot climates.

Landscape Utilization: Strawberries are classic candidates for home gardens and strawberry pots; plants can serve as short-term small scale groundcovers or as edible accents in mixed perennial borders; in the southern half of our region this is a good candidate for a winter patio plant.

Other Comments: Picking and cultivating any sizeable planting of strawberries is backbreaking work; when I was a child, my family maintained three rotating stands of plants ranging from newly transplanted runners, to one- and two-year-old bearing plants; after the second bearing year they were plowed under and a new crop of runners were transplanted to the plot; hand picking and weeding can be a real chore; perhaps it is best to plant a few to enjoy the flavor of a vine-ripened strawberries on desserts, but leave the bulk production to the professionals; there is something sensual about eating strawberries and they have long been considered a delicacy in many cultures.

Native Habitat: *Fragaria* × *ananassa* is a hybrid species derived in cultivation from *Fragaria chiloensis* A.N. Duchesne (Beach Strawberry) × *Fragaria virginiana*.

Related Taxa: Although the garden cultivars of strawberries are oft attributed botanically to *F. chiloensis* × *F. virginiana*, several other species have contributed genes for a variety of traits and this probably represents a multi-species hybrid group; most cultivars are grouped as spring (a single peak of bloom) or everbearing (blooms scattered over the growing season); cultivar selection depends upon the location of use and purpose desired, but our summer heat tends to be hard on everbearing cultivars; readers should consult a local extension agent or certified nursery professional for the latest recommendations for a given locality.

***Fragaria versata* L.**

Common Strawberry

- C Also known as Sow-Teat Strawberry or Wild Strawberry; this species can be found as a natural groundcover in Eastern North America and Europe; it typically inhabits disturbed sites along woodland edges; it has contributed the everbearing traits to some cultivars of Garden Strawberry; cold hardy as far north as USDA zone 5.
- C Alpine Strawberry, *Fragaria versata* 'Semperflorens' (*Fragaria versata* var. *semperflorens*) is a diminutive form used in alpine or rock gardens; also known as Fraise Du Bois.

***Fragaria virginiana* A.N. Duchesne**

Wild Strawberry

- C Also known as Common Strawberry, Prairie Strawberry, or Scarlet Strawberry; this species also contributes everbearing traits to some cultivars of Garden Strawberry; this 6 to 8 inch tall native groundcover species is often found in spreading colonies; although handsome and useful as a wildlife food, plantings often do not offer dense enough canopy coverage to produce a weed free cover; roguing of invading weeds will be required, but this species might be a good choice for naturalized plantings or a candidate for preservation if present when developing a site; plants can be grown in USDA zones 3 to 9 with proper cultivar/provenance selection.
- C Wild Strawberry is widely distributed in North America and is found in Texas in the eastern half of the state; it is a fairly cosmopolitan species occurring in tall grass prairies, savannas, and along moist woodlands; I can vividly remember grazing native stands of this species while growing up in Ohio and wondering who planted those strawberry plants in the middle of nowhere.
- C This species' fruit are much smaller than those of *F. × ananassa*, with flavors ranging from ambrosial to bland; it is an important contributor of flavor to our commercial cultivars.

References: Adams and Leroy, 1992; Ajilvsgi, 1979; Jelitto and Schacht, 1990; Loewer and Mellichamp, 1997; Lyons et al., 1994; McEachern, 1978; Wasowski, 2002.

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