

Chapter 3. Small Fruits

Selecting Small Fruits

Some of the commonly grown small fruits in the Midwest are strawberries, brambles (*e.g.*, raspberries and blackberries), grape, and blueberries.

Small fruits are relatively easier to grow than tree fruits since they require less space and produce fruits sooner. Home-grown berries are very delicious and nutritious. During recent years, there has been strong linkage between antioxidants in berries and cancer prevention. This is one more reason to grow small fruits in the home garden! Each type of small fruit is very different and is discussed in a separate section. It is very important to select disease-resistant or disease-tolerant cultivars, whenever possible. Site selection, planting techniques, and proper care are also essential for successful production of small fruits.



Figure 46. Small fruits, such as blueberries, brambles, and strawberries, are delicious and nutritious. Photo by Scott Bauer, USDA/ARS. Used with permission.

Strawberries (*Fragaria x Ananassa*)

Strawberries are well-suited for planting in the home garden since they produce fruit very quickly and require a relatively small amount of space. Each plant may produce up to one quart of fruit when grown in a matted row during the first fruiting year. Two dozen plants will normally produce enough strawberries for a family of four. Production usually declines during the second and third years of fruiting; therefore, for maximum production, a new planting should be established after strawberry plants produce fruit for more than three to four years.



Figure 47. Strawberries are an excellent crop for home fruit plantings.

Photo courtesy of Nourse Farms Nursery.

Strawberry plants produce attractive fruit with fine flavor. Strawberries have a very high vitamin C content and are versatile as a dessert food. Most cultivars of strawberries are well-suited for freezing and processing as well as for fresh use. Many people enjoy eating the fresh-picked fruit.



Strawberries are also excellent for jams, jellies, and pies. Freshly sliced and sugared strawberries are excellent when served chilled, either alone or over shortcake or ice cream. In addition, strawberries contain a natural substance called ellagic acid, which is an anti-carcinogenic (cancer-preventing) compound.

Figure 48. A berry slushy is one great way to enjoy fresh berries from your own garden and get your vitamins and antioxidants.