

## **Growing Strawberries In Barrels<sup>1</sup>**

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J. M. Stephens and S. J. Locascio<sup>2</sup>

Would you like to grow your own strawberries, but you feel that you do not have enough available space? Then why not use the space-saving barrel method. Each year, about 30 pints of strawberries may be obtained from one 55 gallon barrel (drum) on which 40 to 50 plants may be grown.

### **MATERIAL NEEDED TO GET STARTED**

1. **Barrels or drums** - commonly found are 30 gallon or 55 gallon sizes, either metal, wood, or "plastic" (PVC).
2. **Pipe section** - about 30 inches of PVC, gutter, or stove pipe (3-4" diameter) is needed for watering and feeding.
3. **Coarse gravel** - enough small pebbles to cover the bottom of the barrel; up to 2 inch will be needed for good drainage.
4. **Hole puncher** - some means of cutting hole or slits in the sides and bottom of the barrel will be required, such as an axe, chisel, or acetylene torch.
5. **Good garden soil** - should be clean for best results. Do not use peat or muck, unless mixed well

with sandy soil. Be sure soil is well limed to pH of 6.0 - 6.5

6. **Coarse sand** - to fill watering pipe.
7. **Fertilizer** - 6-6-6 or 6-8-8 is best, but soluble forms may be used.
8. **Plant Mulch** - 1 1/2 mil black plastic mulch to cover the soil surface (or organic mulch).
9. **Strawberry plants** - old standard varieties are Florida Ninety, Tioga, and Florida Belle. Some newer varieties are : Dover, Tufts, Chandler, Oso Grande, and Sweet Charlie.

### **What to Do:**

1. Prepare barrel by cutting out top and thoroughly washing to remove any material that may injure plants. It is optional whether the bottom is cut out or left intact. If not removed, four or five 2 inch diameter holes should be made in the bottom for drainage.
2. Cut holes or slits into the side of the barrel to receive the plants. Holes may be cut in metal using an acetylene torch. If an axe or chisel is used, the holes are much easier to cut if the barrel is filled with soil.

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2. Janes M. Stephens, Professor, Horticultural Sciences Department; S. J. Locascio, Professor, Horticultural Sciences Department, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Holes or slits should be about 3 inches long; then the top of each slit should be pushed in to form a cup.

Hole should be spaced 8 inches apart around the barrel, and 8 inches apart up and down the barrel. Each hole should be placed diagonally to those above and below it. Holes should be 8 inches from the bottom of the barrel and 5 inches or so from the top.

3. Prepare the soil for use by thoroughly mixing one quart of 6-6-6 or 6-8-8 analysis fertilizer into 55 gallons of soil.

4. Fill bottom two inches of the barrel with coarse gravel.

5. Drill or punch holes (nail size) in the sides of the pipe; distribute them 1-2 inches apart over the entire surface of the pipe to allow even watering throughout the barrel. Place the section of pipe into the center of the barrel; it should be standing upright with one end resting on the gravel. Fill the pipe with coarse sand.

6. Shovel in garden soil onto the coarse gravel and around the pipe, until the level of the first (lower) row of hole has been reached. Firm the soil.

7. Set the strawberry plants into the bottom row of holes. Spread the roots in a fan-shape fashion onto the soil and cover to hold in place. **Be careful not to cover the crown (bud).** Set plants October - November in Florida.

Then shovel in soil up to the next row of holes. At this point it is desirable to lightly sprinkle the soil with water. Set plants and repeat the soil filling, watering, and plant-setting until the top row of holes are set. Then add soil to within 1 inch of the barrel top and place plastic mulch over the soil surface. Tuck the edge of the mulch between the inside of the barrel and the soil. Cut hole or slits and set plants on top about 8 inches apart around the pipe. Then water the plants. It is best to set plants during a cloudy day or late afternoon so that plants have time to become established being placed in hot sun.

8. The barrel should be placed so that plants will get full sunlight. Water will probably be needed about twice weekly and should be added by pouring into the pipe. Monthly applications of additional fertilizer is

needed; 1/2 of the same fertilizer can be dissolved in a gallon of water to distribute the fertilizer through the pipe.

9. To insure best results, each year the barrel should be emptied, fresh soil added, and new plants set into the barrel.

10. **Disease control** - to control leaf spots and fruit rots, use an approved fungicide applied once a week. Insect are usually not a problem.

11. **Caution** - Insecticides and fungicides are safe when used as directed on the labels. Take care to store unused portions safely and discard used containers properly. Keep poisons out of reach of irresponsible people.