



Strawberry Plant Failure due to Wet Soil Conditions

Strawberry plants will not survive for very long if they are allowed to grow in compost or soil which is saturated with water. More mature plants are better able to cope with this situation because they have a large root system and should the problem occur during the summer months, have plenty of leaves to remove excess moisture but even they will die in time if this is allowed to carry on. Very young plants will be affected much more quickly because they are unable to remove excess water quick enough.

DAMAGE

Over-watering of strawberry plants for prolonged periods will cause rotting of the roots, which turn black. The first indication of compost being too wet will be flagging leaves as a result of root failure. Such plants will not recover.

STRAWBERRY PLANTS IN THE OPEN GROUND

On heavy soils, poor drainage can lead to disease infection and rotting of the roots. Prior to planting, the soil should be dug with a spade or fork to a depth of 25cm (10in) and the bottom of the trench forked over in order to break up any hard layers of soil and improve drainage. Ideally this should be done several weeks beforehand to allow the ground time to resettle. An application of organic matter at the rate of a barrow-load to 5m² (6yd²) in the form of well rotted farmyard manure (but not poultry manure) or spent mushroom or garden compost should be spread on the soil after digging and forked into a depth of 15cm (6in).

Strawberry plants can be cultivated on raised beds to reduce the risk of waterlogging. For information on how to construct and plant a raised bed, please refer to the 'Grow Your Own Strawberries' or 'Grow Your Own Fruit' handbook.

STRAWBERRY PLANTS IN GROWBAGS & CONTAINERS

Choosing the correct compost when planting is fundamental to success. The ideal compost is one that retains water and nutrients for a long period but does not become waterlogged through overwatering. If the plants are to be grown in a large deep traditional strawberry planter the mixture must consist of three quarters by volume of a good quality peat based general purpose potting compost or a John Innes No.2 to one quarter of perlite or coarse grit. These ingredients are obtainable from most garden centres. There should be no deviation from this mixture otherwise there may be plant losses, particularly if the compost has been overwatered. Self-Watering Towerpots can again be planted using the above peat based composts without the addition of coarse grit or perlite.

Strawberry plants should be planted in a compost that is damp to begin with. The moisture content can be increased as the plants expand and the temperature rises, but not to the

extent of allowing the compost to become saturated. No hard and fast instructions can be given for watering because plants require very limited amounts of water when they are small, temperatures are low and under dull light conditions. Frequent watering is required when temperatures are high, the sun is shining, the plants are large and the fruits are swelling. A test to ascertain whether the compost is too wet is to take some in the hand and squeeze it. If the compost is saturated, any excess moisture will be squeezed out.

Self-Watering Towerpots are designed so that as long as there is only some water in the reservoir, the capillary wick will transfer it to the compost until saturation point is reached and the compost cannot absorb anymore. You should therefore allow the reservoirs to empty themselves from time to time so that the compost remains moist but not fully saturated.

During the winter months (early November to early March), it is advisable to move containers undercover into a garage, garden shed or unheated greenhouse. If this is not possible, they can be covered with clear polythene. Self-Watering Towerpots can either be moved undercover or dismantled and turned on their side to allow excess water to drain away. It is important that the compost is not left to completely dry out over the winter.