

Strawberry Picking Time

James A. Fizzell

Sr. Ext. Adviser, U. of I.

Strawberries! Who can resist them? According to James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Horticulturist from Cook County, we are fortunate to have farms nearby where we can pick strawberries ourselves. You can't get anything fresher than that.

There are "Pick-Your-Own" establishments located throughout the midwest. They are more popular each season as more and more people become aware of them. Many of these farms grow a variety of produce including the strawberries that start off the picking season, and ending with apple and pumpkin picking in the fall.

Before heading out to the berry patch, call to make sure there is picking that day and to see if you need to bring any containers. Wear a hat, sunglasses, and if you aren't used to the sun, long-sleeves and pants.

Some of the berry farms are listed here. For a complete list write the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Marketing Division at P. O. Box 4906, Springfield, IL 62708-4906.

Strawberries look better and keep longer when they are picked and handled correctly. They are tender. They will bruise and discolor anytime they are squeezed. Handle them gently at all times.

Whether you pick strawberries from your own garden or at a Pick-Your-Own farm, keep in mind the following tips:

1. Be careful that your feet and knees don't damage plants or fruit in or along the edge of the row. At a Pick-Your-Own farm, it is important that you pick only on the row assigned

to you. Remember at these farms, these plants are the grower's livelihood.

2. Many growers furnish picking containers designed for strawberries. If you use your own container, remember that heaping strawberries more than 5 inches deep will bruise the lower berries.
3. Pick only the berries that are fully red. Part the leaves with your hands to avoid missing hidden berries ready for harvest.
4. Pick the row clean. Remove berries showing rot, sunburn, insect injury, or other defects from the plants and place them in between the rows behind you.
5. Berries to be used immediately may be picked anytime, but if you plan to hold the fruit for a few days, try to pick during early morning or on cool cloudy days. Berries picked during the heat of the day become soft, are easily bruised and may not keep well.
6. Avoid placing the picked berries in the sun any longer than necessary. It is better to put them in the shade of a tree or shed rather than in the trunk or on the seat of your car. Cool them as soon as possible after picking. Strawberries may be kept fresh in the refrigerator for three or more days depending on the initial quality of the berry. After a few days in storage, the fruit loses its bright color and fresh flavor and tends to shrivel.
7. Give the harvested fruit a soft ride home. When you get the berries home, sort, but do not clean them until just before use. Berries lose food value quickly after washing and capping.

(cont'd. page 19)

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(Strawberry cont'd.)

For an easy way to use extra berries, try no-cook strawberry jam.

Uncooked Strawberry Jam

- 3 cups crushed strawberries (about 1 1/2 quart boxes)
- 5 cups sugar
- 1 package powdered fruit pectin
- 1 cup water

Measure berries into a large mixing bowl. Add sugar, mix well, and let stand for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Dissolve pectin in water, bring to a boil and boil for 1 minute. Add this solution to the berry mixture and stir for 2 minutes. Ladle jam into freezer containers or canning jars; leave 1/2 inch space at the top. Cover containers and let stand for 24 hours or until jam has set. Store in refrigerator or freezer. Jam will keep up to 3 weeks in the refrigerator or up to a year in the freezer. Makes 7 half-pints.

If the jam is too firm, stir to soften. If it is too soft, bring it to a boil and it will thicken on cooling.

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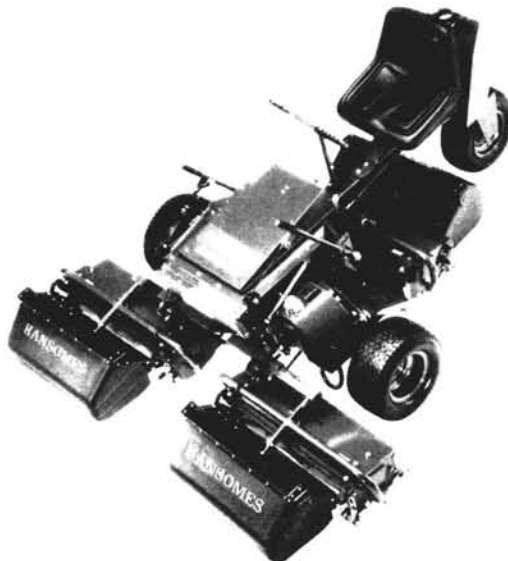
A Rewarding Handicap

by Edwin Wollenburg, retired superintendent

Several weeks ago, while looking for my ball that had gone askew from the fairway that had been so carefully designed by Robert Trent Jones for me to follow, I came upon a patch of wild strawberries. My pursuit to challenge and humiliate the course rating, ceased here immediately as I feasted on these luscious tiny berries. Wild strawberries have to be the sweetest berries that grow. Why there aren't more of them anymore, is one of those tantalizing mysteries of the open fields.

Wild strawberries once were plentiful in sunny places almost everywhere. I think it has been 50 years since I last plunked one of those sweetest of all morsels into my mouth, I can remember my grandmother telling me, that they used to pick them by the pailful and refer to them as "more pleasing than honey to the tongue." My mother used to make jam from the pickings in the hayfield before it was cut for fodder. A finer jam has never graced a table. And anointed with honest-to-

(cont'd. page 20)



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