

Extension Notes

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

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Mulching Strawberry Plants

Hopefully, you have a chance to mulch your strawberry plantings before the winter cold arrives for good. Mulch helps reduce the freezing and thawing of the soil that breaks off the small roots and, in some cases, can lift the plants partially out of the ground, translating into smaller berries and reduced yields.

Mulching also slows plant development in the spring which reduces the chances of frost injury to the flowers. Additionally, mulch conserves moisture, keeps berries off the ground which reduces rot development, and keeps dirt off of the berries. It can also reduce weed development making harvest much nicer under wet conditions.

Wheat straw is the preferred mulch material, but oat and rye straw also work well. Try to acquire mulch that does not contain a lot of weed, wheat, oat, or rye seeds as this can substantially increase weed control requirements in the spring. Apply the mulch when the night temperature is expected to reach about 20 degrees F which is usually sometime in mid-December in Kentucky.

Cover the plants so you can still see a number of leaves peeking out from beneath the straw. Excessive mulch can smother plants.

When spring comes, don't hurry mulch removal. The mulch will protect the strawberry fruit buds as long as it remains on the plant. Remove the mulch when the plants have begun to grow, and the foliage looks slightly yellow. If the mulch is left on too long, it could substantially reduce your yield.

If you are a fruit or vegetable grower or are thinking about becoming one, the 2024 Kentucky Fruit & Vegetable Conference will be January 2-4 at the Slone Convention Center in Bowling Green, KY. Topics will include commercial fruit and vegetable production, farmers' markets, organic farming and gardening, direct marketing and more. Visit <https://kyhortcouncil.org/> for more information on the conference.

For more information on mulching contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. The Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment is an Equal Opportunity Organization with respect to education and employment and authorization to provide research, education information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Upcoming Events:

- **Ag Advancement Council Meeting** – Monday, November 20th @ 6:00 PM
- **Ag Development Board Meeting** – Monday, November 20th @ 7:00 PM
- The **UK Fall Crop Webinar Series** continues on Thursdays at 10:00 AM through November 30th. Call 474-6686 for more information and to register.
- **Northeast Area Livestock Association Meeting** – Tuesday, November 28th @ 6:00 PM; Speaker: Jonathan Shepherd, UK Farm Management Specialist; Topic: Agricultural Tax Issues and Strategic Tax Management