

Grow Your Own... Desserts

Strawberry and oatmeal muffins

We like this recipe for Strawberry and Oatmeal muffins which are packed with healthy ingredients. Substitute or add to the strawberries with blueberries grown in your school garden.

http://citronlimette.com/recipe_archive/breakfast/strawberry-oatmeal-muffins/

Fruit ice cubes & lollies

Freeze the abundance of your school garden into edible petal ice-cubes, and cooling fruit ice-lollies. Borage, nasturtium, viola, calendula and rose petals can all added to ice-cube trays before freezing. The colourful petals will give a magical flourish to your summer picnic drinks.

Pureed berries from your school garden can be mixed with natural fruit juice and frozen in lolly makers for a healthier, school-grown ice-lolly with no added sugar.

For more ideas see:

www.jamieoliver.com/recipes/fruit-recipes/smoothie-ice-lollies

www.jamieoliver.com/recipes/fruit-recipes/strawberry-ice-lollies

Growing your strawberries

When to Start: cold stored runners (which look like little pieces of root with a few leaves) can be planted out from April onwards. Leaves will develop as the plants become established.

Average time to harvest: plants bought as runners will fruit approximately 60 days from planting.

Plant

1. If space allows, grow in rows directly in the soil in open ground or raised beds as a 'strawberry patch'.
2. Plants should be evenly spaced allowing between 25 and 30cm between plants.
3. The hole for each plant should be deep enough to accommodate the roots of the plant with the crown resting just on the surface of the soil when backfilled. If roots of plants are very long they can be lightly trimmed back to around 10cm before planting.
4. Plants should be watered in well after planting and frequently whilst plants are establishing. Water plants from the base of the plant to avoid rotting the crown or the fruits.

Grow

5. As the fruits begin to develop, tuck some straw in around the plants to prevent the fruits from rotting on the soil. A mulch of straw will provide the added benefit of suppressing unwanted weeds.
6. Once the fruits begin to ripen be sure to cover with netting, many birds and garden visitors are also keen on strawberries.



Eat

7. Early season strawberries can be ready to harvest by the end of June and early July. They should be hand-picked when the berry is fully ripe and bright red. If possible pick the fruits during the warmest part of the day as this is when they will be most tasty!
8. The harvesting period can be bought forward by 7 to 10 days if a tunnel cloche is placed over the plants in spring, though will need to be removed when plants are flowering to allow pollinating insects to have access to the plants.

Top tip Summer fruiting strawberries have a short but heavy cropping period of about 2 to 3 weeks. There are lots of cultivars to choose from. To be sure to have some ready for a picnic try some early or mid-season varieties such as Honeoye, Pegasus and Elsanta. Alternatively, try an ever bearing variety (cropping all season from May to November) such as flamenco, which will produce an abundance of small and tasty berries, ideal if space is limited. Strawberries can successfully be grown in hanging baskets and make a valuable contribution to vertical growing schemes.

Purchasing a few plants at the beginning of the growing season will provide a great opportunity to increase plant stock for next year for free. Strawberries propagate really well with little input. During late summer plants will begin to send out new runners and small plantlets will begin to develop. When growing in open ground, runners can be pegged into the soil to encourage new plant growth and root formation, alternatively insert the runners into 9cm pots filled with compost, once a root system has established the runner can be cut from the original parent plant. A new set of plants will be ready to bare delicious fruits next summer!

More detail on strawberry growing and propagation:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=306

