

Strawberries

It's surprisingly simple to grow this summer classic all season long.

BY LESLEY PORCELLI

Nine out of 10 preschoolers prefer strawberries to other fruits they may be offered. Okay, there's no hard science to back this up; we just know it's true. And if your child were going to eat only one kind of fruit, you'd be hard pressed to do better; strawberries are loaded with vitamin C and antioxidants.

Grow Your Own

You'll have the best luck with strawberries if you plant them not from

seed, but from young plants (available in home and garden stores), that you can place either in the ground or in hanging baskets, as long as they have full sun. Purchase plants of the everbearing variety to ensure fruit all summer long. Growing strawberries in containers has the added bonus of eliminating the need for weeding. Even better, potted plants are much less apt to be eaten by pests or succumb to diseases. And there's no need to purchase specially

Play With Your Food

- Make strawberry faces on pancakes or cereal: Use lengthwise slices for eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Hull and halve strawberries and you've got heart-shaped stamps. Let the berries stand at room temperature a few minutes after slicing to get the juices flowing.

Buy organic if possible. Most conventionally grown strawberries are loaded with pesticides.





designed strawberry pots; ordinary planters work perfectly well.

1. Select the appropriate pot or basket: a medium strawberry pot or a 12-inch-diameter standard planter.
2. Fill with ready-mixed soil (ask your local garden center which is most appropriate for strawberries) or make your own blend of potting soil, sand, and peat moss.
3. Place five or six plants in the container early in the season and water each day. Keep in full sun.
4. In less than a month, little white blossoms will emerge. Watch for honeybees sipping nectar from the flowers. Strawberries will grow from the blooms, appearing first as small white fruits that redden over the course of several days. When they are red, plump, and juicy looking, pick the berries so they don't rot on the plant. Pick by pinching the stem above the fruit and cradling the berry with a hand so it isn't bruised when it drops.

RECIPE

Strawberry Pizza

Makes two 8-inch "pizzas"

For the crust:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tbsp. butter, melted

For the topping:

- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp. sugar or more to taste
- 12 fresh strawberries, sliced

Preheat oven to 450 degrees and measure the dry ingredients.

Give your child a fork and have him stir the dry ingredients together in a large bowl. Then he can dump the cream and melted butter into the bowl and stir the mixture with a rubber spatula until the dough clumps together.

Next, let him knead the dough a few times in the bowl. Help him sandwich stray crumbs into the dough until they're mixed in. Divide into two balls.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough with a floured rolling pin into two rounds, each about ¼ inch thick. Be sure to let your kid take a few spins with the pin.

Bake crusts on baking sheets until golden, about 15 minutes. Cool.

While the crusts bake, have your child pour the ½ cup of heavy cream into a bowl. Beat at high speed for about 30 seconds, then add sugar and beat until it holds stiff peaks. Give your child a big spoon and have him spread half the whipped cream on each crust. Let him grab a handful of strawberry "pepperoni" and scatter it across the surface. Slice like a pizza and enjoy. T

Fun Facts

- Strawberries are the only fruit with seeds on the outside of their skin, about 200 on each berry.
- Strawberries are members of the large, diverse rose family (Rosaceae) that also includes blackberries and raspberries.
- In some parts of Europe, people once believed elves could control how much milk cows produced and that the elves loved strawberries. Farmers tied baskets of strawberries to their cows' horns as an offering to them.
- The largest strawberry in history weighed 8.17 ounces and was the size of a big apple.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU One serving of this pizza provides a good chunk of vitamin A (60% of the RDA for a child), which helps boost the immune system.