



Species Information – *Fragaria vesca* By Michael J Wellik

Genus: Fragaria *Species: vesca*

Subspecies and Form: subspecies vesca forma semperflorens

Family: Rosaceae *Ploidy: diploid*

Other Names: fraises des bois, fragola di bosco, Fragaria alpina, alpine strawberry, wild strawberry, European wild strawberry, clumping strawberry, gourmet strawberry

Native Range: Most of Europe including Great Britain, to temperate Asia.

Varieties/Selections: Plants are produced from seed or division. Because they are open pollinated there are no varieties. A number of selections have been made over many years. These can be called selections, cultivars or land races.

Plant Type: Herbaceous perennial reaching up to 18 in tall by 24 in wide

Hardiness: zones 5 – 8, coastal zones 9 and 10

Seed Description: Alpine strawberry seeds (more accurately called achenes) are tiny. They can remain viable for a number of years but typically can be held for two years and still have acceptable germination rates. Minimum standard for commerce is 60%. Seed color ranges from yellow to red and are indicators of the fruit color, though not always accurate.

When to Sow: For planning purposes it takes about 14 weeks from sowing to first fruit when grown indoors at 70°F. It's best to use well draining sterile media with a slightly acid pH. Do not cover seed. Light aids germination. Do not allow to dry out during germination process. Even short dry periods can cause seedling death. Initial germination usually starts at 6 days but may take 30 days or more for all viable seeds to germinate.

Preconditioning: Freeze seed for at least 3 to 4 weeks before sowing. Preconditioned seed germinates faster and germination is more uniform.

Seed Storage: Store in air tight container in freezer for up to two years.



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Grow In: Hydroponics, cold frame, greenhouse, high tunnel, low tunnel, cloche, raised beds, gardens, containers including pots and hanging baskets, commercial. Long term container grown use aeration containers.

Description: The alpine strawberry was discovered in the Swiss Alps over 300 years ago. It is a clumping type of strawberry that normally produces few to no runners. The clumps expand over time via underground stolons and become more productive in the second and third years. Weeds and sometimes viruses can limit production over time. The plants tend to exhaust themselves over a period of a few years due to their vigorous production of flowers and fruit. Unpicked fruit can result in volunteers that may be very different from the parent plant due to cross pollination. Volunteers from a clumping red fruiting selection can produce runners and white fruit. It is more common for white fruiting clumping types to produce volunteers that are red fruiting runner types. There are many selections known and grown as cultivars. Some are being marketed under several names for the same selection. Plants are very vigorous and will bloom cyclically over long periods if environmental and soil conditions are adequate. The plants are day neutral which means they are not dependent on day length for reblooming. The plants are heavy feeders that prefer a well drained soil with high organic matter. A winter mulch is necessary in colder growing zones. Some selections may be less hardy than the range given above. Allow 4 sq ft per plant for best production. Tolerates shade but is most productive in full sun. There has been virtually no breeding done with alpine strawberries. Gardeners and commercial growers have selected plants with unique characteristics.

Fruit Description: Fruit is much smaller than the hybrid strawberries that are widely available. The fruit is extremely fragile with a storage life of 24 hours unless frozen. For best flavor the fruit should be harvested at full ripeness and chilled immediately to remove the heat. Fruit shape varies by selection. Fruit color of selections ranges from red to white with some selections having ripe fruit that is pale yellow. If plants are allowed sufficient space and ample nutrients fruit production can be very high after the first year. The fruit is fairly small, up to 0.5 in diameter, but it is produced cyclically from early summer until the frosts of autumn.

Uses: Fruit is most often eaten fresh but can be cooked, baked into pastries, used as flavoring, wine/liqueur or made into preserves. The fruit can be frozen but collapses when thawed so is best used in cooking or flavoring after being frozen. Sweet and succulent with an exquisite taste, they are far superior to the cultivated strawberries in both flavor and aroma. Gourmet restaurants offer fresh fruit in season fresh or in pastries. Fruit can also be used for strawberry leather. Young leaves can be used raw or cooked. Added to salads or used as a potherb. The fresh or dried leaves are used as a tea substitute. The root has



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been used as a coffee substitute in some countries. Fruit is known to whiten teeth when used fresh and the achenes (what we call seeds) are used as an abrasive in skin cleaners.

Known Pests: Seedlings are susceptible to damping off, powdery mildew and fungus gnats. Aphids can be a pest and special care should be taken to reduce aphid populations because they can transmit viruses. Plants are susceptible to root rot with no resistance to this disease complex known in any selections. Common foliar diseases include leaf spots and leaf scorch. Other pests are possible and known but these are the ones most often encountered.

Note: There are plants sold that produce red or pink flowers that are marketed as alpiners. These intergeneric hybrids are derived from a forced cross of various *Fragaria* species with *Potentilla* species. These are not alpiners and are considered GMOs. There are several examples of these in the marketplace that are called alpine strawberries. Also note that some sellers are using pictures of what are commonly called pine berries (*F. x ananassa*) in descriptions for white fruiting alpiners.

Note: The Strawberry Store can not take any responsibility for any adverse effects from the use of plants. Always seek advice from a professional before using a plant medicinally.