

# healthy HOME



## Spring On The Strawberries!

Before we even get going, I've got to tell you a secret... vertical strawberry towers might sound a bit daunting to DIY, but they're very easy to build and very practical – especially when it comes to successfully growing all kinds of shallow rooting plants – from berries, to herbs, to annual flowers. So please hang tight and trust me on this one, it's going to be much easier than you might think.

Also, vertical strawberry towers can be made with many different materials and in many different styles. If you find the materials I use to be less your style, you can always use alternative materials like large pieces of cut and hollowed bamboo or even old wine barrels. The only downfall of using unique and alternative materials is that you'll have to do extra research, buy additional materials, and purchase specialized drill bits and such – but, if that's what you desire, go for it! Never give up on your ideas and passions – try, test, do, and enjoy!

Ok, let's “spring” on those delicious little red health boosters...

You know strawberries taste great, are wonderfully sweet, and add texture and flavor to many recipes such as fresh berry cobblers, smoothies, salads, fruity salsas, and more – but, did you know they're also loaded with numerous health boosting nutrients?

Yep, you guessed it, like all berries, strawberries are high in vitamin- C, but that's just the tip of the tasty strawberry iceberg. I've discovered that strawberries do amazing things for the body – from head to toe.

To begin with, Strawberries are super stars when it comes to brain and eye health. Strawberries are rich in many minerals and vitamins, including iodine, potassium, and magnesium which help to reduce eye pressure and deflect the effects of oxidative and free radical damage. This kind of damage, often associated with an unhealthy diet and stressful lifestyle, is also associated with decreased cognitive function and decreased blood flow to the brain. But, thanks to the powerhouse of nutrients in strawberries, you can tastefully eat your way towards boosted memory and improved concentration. Yum, right?

The potassium and magnesium found in strawberries might also help to reduce high blood pressure. You see, potassium and magnesium help to balance sodium levels which all work to balance out blood pressure. And, speaking of blood pressure, because strawberries are free from all fats – they're super healthy for overall heart health. The good stuff found in strawberries helps reduce LDL cholesterol and can aid the body by sweeping and cleaning the arteries a bit.

Believe it or not, the list goes on and on. And, if you know anyone dealing with arthritis, inflammation, gout, immune system problems, chronic colds, coughs, infections, premature aging, toxic exposures, or muscle spasms, turn them on to strawberries too. They'll certainly benefit.

Of course, the best way to absorb the health boosting nutrients found in strawberries is to eat them fresh, straight from the garden, or to work them into some of your sweet and savory favorites – like jams, jellies, chutneys, salsas, and healthy parfaits. For instance, strawberries make delectable jams, especially when paired with stevia instead of refined white sugar. With stevia, it's easy to get a sweet taste without any added sugars and your result will be a low glycemic alternative to store bought products that often spike blood sugar and cause weight gain.

I won't take too much time to convince you of how delicious this strawberry stevia jam tastes or how easy it is to make, but I will encourage

you to give it a try, make it in bulk, and definitely gift it to friends and family instead of commercially prepared jams. If there's a great way to put all of the strawberries you'll be growing on your vertical strawberry towers to good use, this is the way.

### Strawberry Stevia Jam

#### Supplies and Ingredients:

- 1 large stainless steel or other non-coated saucepan
- Wooden stirring spoons
- 1 packet pectin
- 3 cups clean mashed organic strawberries
- 1 tbsp. stevia
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 3/4 cup cold water
- 1 tbsp. lemon zest
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 pinch sea salt

#### Directions:

Put your pre measured 3/4 cup of cold water and pectin into a saucepan and set to a boil. Stir while boiling.

Slowly reduce the heat and simmer for a minute or two on medium heat. Continue to stir.

Add your pre-cleaned and mashed strawberries to the pot and cook for one minute. Make sure to continuously stir.

As you stir, add the stevia, cinnamon, ground cloves, lemon zest, pepper, and salt.

Remove from the heat and allow the jam to cool.

After the jam is completely cool, pour into bottles or jars and store in the fridge.

This is a very straightforward, easy to make, and very tasty strawberry jam recipe. Usually, when I'm preparing recipes as simple as this one, I'll let my boys manage the show. Remember, when you have the opportunity to introduce healthy foods and healthy recipes to your children, take advantage of it. But most of all, as with all things "Healthy Home Workshop", have fun while you're learning, working, making, cooking, or building.

Now, on to the vertical strawberry towers...

Growing strawberries is one of the easiest crops to grow and I really encourage you to get on board. You see, I've been growing strawberries in a large raised bed for years now, but I'm bound and determined to get them growing all over my property – and growing vertically is a beautiful way to do so, especially around stairs, decks, patios, and other non traditional garden areas.

Because they make for beautiful patio and garden features, vertical strawberry towers have always been very popular among professional landscape artists, gardeners, and green space enthusiasts. Today, instead of reinventing the wheel, I'll be sharing one of the best vertical tower designs I've found. What I'll be sharing is the exact plan an expert gardener, from Australia, known as the Urban GreenSpace blogger published for public use.

And, because April is the exact time to get our berries started, we have no time to waste... Let's get to it!

### Vertical Strawberry Towers

Materials: (This is exactly what the Urban GreenSpace Blogger uses and what you'll need too.)

- A 2 or 3mm drill bit for the watering pipe.
- An electric drill with a hole-cutting bit that will cut a 5 – 7cm hole. • A length of PVC downpipe 4-6 inches or 100mm-150mm diameter. (The length will = the height of the unit)
- End cap for the downpipe.
- A narrower diameter (.5 inch or 15 mm) length of downpipe for watering. Make it about 3-4 inches or 8 –10cm longer than the downpipe. If you have a pressurized irrigation system, you can use a length of soak hose instead.
- A cork.
- A knife.
- Duct tape
- A length of geotextile (burlap / hessian would do) for wrapping the watering pipe.
- Twine for tying the fabric to the watering tube.
- Good fertile soil (test it if you can – strawberries prefer it slightly acidic).
- 1 liter or so of coarse gravel.
- Strawberry plants (I used a mixture of different varieties).
- A few companion plants (nasturtiums or marigolds work and look great). • Large tub or box (to stand on while filling).
- Fixing collar.

Directions: (exactly how the Urban GreenSpace Blogger goes about it)

1. Cutting - “Decide on the length of the unit and cut the tower tube and watering tube accordingly. Don’t forget to make the watering tube 8-10cm (3-4 inches) longer! I made mine the height of the outside staircase outside as it gets pretty good sun there and the rails give me something to secure the unit to.”
2. Drilling the watering tube - “Drill vent holes in the watering tube. Only drill these in the top 2/3 of the tube, as the water will run down to the bottom plants. If you put holes all the way down, the upper planter won’t get quite enough water as it will all rush out the lower holes. If you think you will do a good job of capping off the base end of the tube, you can put one small hole at the bottom so it doesn’t go anaerobic in there.”
3. Completing the watering tube - “Cut the geotextile or burlap/hessian to the shape that will cover the holes in the watering pipe. You don’t want roots getting in there and clogging it up. Then carefully with a knife, whittle down the cork til’ it fits the end of the watering tube. Now seal it off with duct tape (You don’t want this coming apart while you assemble and plant your tower!).”
4. Cutting the holes in the tower - “Cut the holes in the tower tube. Remember that one side will face the wall so only put holes on the surfaces that will get sunlight. I made 3 rows of holes and staggered them with holes about 20cm (8 inches) depth apart vertically. Leave the last 20cm intact with no holes. Some of this will be a reservoir of the lower level plants.”
5. Filling - “Place the large container against the wall – a corner is best so the tube is less likely to fall over. Place the end cap over the base of the tube (I didn’t seal mine so I can disassemble the unit and make modifications if necessary.) Insert watering tube then fill the bottom 10 cm (which is about 4 inches) with coarse gravel.”
6. Planting - “For the lowest hole I recommend planting a companion, less incentive for pests to climb up. If you are using stoloniferous varieties (those strawberries that spread with runners along the surface) you can leave a few gaps in the lower holes. As the runners cascade down you can poke them into these vacant spaces. Saves a few bucks, huh? When filling, I found it easiest to pour the soil from the top and poke the plants in the holes. Make every 6th hole a companion.”
7. Location - “Once it’s planted make sure, when moving it around, that you hold it with one hand under the end cap if it’s not fixed. (Nothing like watching your plantings all shoot out the end to remind you of this necessity.) Remember, once you have your tower in place, secure it with your chosen fixings.”
8. Watering - “You will need to do this daily in warmer weather. Vertical units do require vigilant watering. The last thing you want is for it to dry out!”

See friends, building a vertical strawberry tower is not that bad at all and well worth the time effort. Like most things that make a positive difference and bring beauty into our lives, attention, time, and love are required – but well worth it!

I just know you’re going to enjoy getting your hands dirty building and planting this season. I’m also confident you’ll delight in your DIY garden designs, your strawberry harvests, and all of the delicious meals, snacks, and treats you’ll be making and sharing.

Peace,

Jessa