



# PROTECTING STRAWBERRIES FROM BIRDS

WITH NETTING AND MYLAR TAPE

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EXTENSION

MOST OF US like to see birds in and around our gardens. But once in a while they become too numerous and compete with us for what we eat. Since you're reading this publication, you must be curious, frustrated, or both about how to keep birds out of your strawberries. You are probably wondering why you spend time and money on a berry patch when the birds get most of the berries. Well, here are a few tips to help you even the odds.

Birds are difficult to control because they are extremely mobile. If you scare them away from one area, they will congregate in another. If your neighbor scares them again, they may fly back to your strawberry patch. They often develop a movement pattern that takes them from one feeding area to another throughout the day. And you can't just stand there and flap your arms at them. When the birds find out you can't run fast enough to catch them they'll just stay out of your reach.

Some people use scarecrows. We all know what happens to scarecrows. After a few days they become roosts for every bird in the neighborhood. Somewhat more effective are artificial scaring devices, such as rubber snakes, plastic owls, eye balloons, flapping wooden ducks, noise-making "clickers" and devices that imitate squawking birds. These must be moved regularly and interchanged with other devices, otherwise the birds become used to them and take over the garden again.

Some repelling devices, like ultrasonics, have not been proven in the field. My advice to you is to stay away from this equipment and use the money you save to buy fresh-picked strawberries from your local grocer.

Protective netting, properly installed, does a good job of keeping birds out of small strawberry plots. It is inexpensive and easy to install. It does, however, make picking somewhat cumbersome. The netting mesh must be  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch in diameter or smaller without any holes.

Secure all the edges to the ground. You may have to pile loose soil over the netting to keep birds from working their way underneath. Suspend the netting above and away from the edges of the plants (Fig. 1). Otherwise,

birds will walk across the plants and harvest the fruit through the netting's mesh.



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Figure 1. Wire netting with a simple wooden frame.

Another solution, particularly for larger plantings, is mylar tape. This "bird tape" is  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wide mylar with red- and silver-coated reflective surfaces. If set up properly, it is the least expensive, most effective way to scare off birds.

To set it up, drive a stout stake in the ground at the end of each row on each side of the plants. One stake between rows is enough if the rows are closely spaced (Fig. 2).



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Figure 2. A strawberry row with bird tape on each side.

Tie a cord or string around each stake 3 or 4 inches above the ground. Leave 6 to 8 inches of free cord at both ends (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. A stake with the cord, fiberglass strapping tape and bird tape attached.

Attach a short piece of fiberglass strapping tape to the end of the bird tape so that the ends stick together, but leave an open loop in the strapping tape. Run the string through this loop. Stretch the bird tape out tightly to the next stake. (The stakes should be less than 30 feet apart.) Stick another length of strapping tape to this end, twist the mylar 3 or 4 times and tie the string or cord through the loop.

The tape should sag slightly but should not be less than 3 inches or more than 5 inches from the ground. It also should not touch the plants. If it does, either move the stakes away from the plants a few inches or remove some of the leaves. The tape should move freely. When a breeze or slight wind blows it will flash in the sun.

Mylar tape is strong, but it quickly breaks where it is knotted or is wrapped around a hard object, like the stakes. Tying them to the stakes or string doesn't work, but the fiberglass strapping tape holds well and does not stress the mylar. The string or cord lets the mylar freely rotate in the wind, scaring off the birds with a fantastic display of flashing red and silver light.

Don't use bird tape as streamers or string it across the tops of the plants; it is useless this way. Birds feed between the rows. If you don't believe me, sit in your garden and watch the birds for 15 or 20 minutes. Most will fly into the strawberry patch, land on the ground between the plants and eat the ripe strawberries from there. Tape strung above the plants only alters their flight path a little.

Bird tape must be constantly monitored and repaired or replaced if necessary. If it stretches out, retighten it. When plant leaves grow and interfere with the tape's movement, trim them. You must replace bird tape that has been out in the sun more than six weeks because the red and silver coating wears off.

Send in your testimonials and improvements. I'd be glad to hear from you.

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