

**My strawberry plants are not even close in appearance to the ones I see around in the field. They are small, many of the leaves are purple and there is no fruit to speak of. What is the problem here?
Could it be that my nursery stock is no good? Or does the plant need more fertilizer?**

This is a question not uncommon to this office now that spring is underway and strawberry plants are supposed to start to producing fruit.

As a review, strawberries are grown from transplants, and not from seeds. This means that the grower receives a small plant, complete with crown, roots and occasionally leaves. This plant comes from an offshoot, known as a runner, from a mother plant. The strawberry transplant is most often planted in the Monterey Bay area in the late fall, allowed to establish itself over the winter with the intent of beginning fruit production in the late spring of the following year.

One of the first things that come to mind when one hears of an undersized strawberry plant is whether or not it was established properly. Growers of strawberries, both of large and small scale, should always focus on plant establishment of strawberries, and in fact it is one of the most important steps of strawberry cultivation. Was the soil well tilled and well prepared prior to planting? Was the transplant inserted at the proper depth? Was the transplant well watered after planting to settle the soil and moisten the area around the planting area? Was the transplant free of obvious signs of disease or damage? These are all important aspects of establishing a successful plant.

Note that while the purple color you observe on the leaves is consistent with phosphorous nutrient deficiency, the poor establishment of the plant is likely more to blame for its inability to gather this nutrient in sufficient quantities. Only in cases of extreme nutritional deficiency is plant size affected, especially early in the season when the plant is still able to draw on starch reserves built up during its growth as a plant on a runner.

This has been a brief guide to proper plant establishment in strawberry. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.