

Brambles

Blackberries, Raspberries, and the 'Austin' Dewberry

Blackberries and dewberries are easy to grow and very productive for the backyard gardener. Raspberries are more of a challenge in our alkaline soil and heat but may be worth the effort for the serious raspberry fan. Blackberries need *at least* 8 hours of full sun. Dewberries are more tolerant of some afternoon shade. Raspberries *need* afternoon shade, but give them about 6 hours of direct morning sun.

Amend the soil thoroughly before planting, especially for raspberries. Mix in plenty of **high quality compost** to existing soil, or create a raised bed by using a **quality garden soil**. Raspberries can also be grown in a container, using a quality potting soil.

High nitrogen fertilizer is best applied in split applications, with the first application made in spring as buds begin swelling, and the second made in summer after the fruit harvest is completed. Other nutrients are only occasionally deficient. If soil pH is over 8.0, blackberries can exhibit interveinal chlorosis from iron deficiency, which is corrected with soil applications of iron, or foliar feeding with Seaweed Plus Iron.¹ See our handout *Planting and Maintenance Guide for Fruits, Nuts, & Berries* for more information.

Space blackberries and raspberries 2 to 3 feet apart. Dewberries should be spaced 5 feet apart. To plant the bramble at the proper depth, allow the first root (coming out of the bottom of the stem) to be at, or slightly above, the soil line

Brambles may produce shoots from the roots. These can be cut down to keep them under control, or with a sharp shovel cut out and transplant to propagate new plants.

Dewberries need no pruning, unless you want to train them onto a fence or trellis. **Blackberries** are biennial plants having two types of canes. Current-season canes are called “primocanes” and one year-old canes are called “floricanes”. Floricanes are flowerbearing canes, which die after the fruit crop matures. Every year after harvest, cut all old canes (the very ones you just stripped clean of berries) down to ground level. Allow only the vigorous new growth to remain. When these new canes reach 3–4 feet long, thin them so that only 5-7 canes per plant remain. At the same time, prune back the canes to 4 feet long to encourage branching, on which the bramble will fruit next year. Harvest when fruit is dark black-purple, soft, and releases easily from the stem! At peak production you may need to harvest daily. It may be helpful to use bird netting to protect your harvest.

Raspberries produce fruit at the top of first-year canes in late summer. If allowed to overwinter, these same canes will produce fruit again in early summer of the second year. However, the quality of this early summer fruit is poor. Also, harvesting the early summer second-year crop is difficult because of interference from new primocanes. Most growers sacrifice the early summer second-year crop in favor of a smaller, but higher quality late summer primocane crop. To prune raspberries for a single late season crop, the canes need only be cut to the ground in early spring. New canes will grow each year and fruit in late summer, the canes will be cut early the following spring, and the cycle continues. It is important to cut old canes as close to the ground as possible so that buds will break from below the soil surface. If canes are not cut low enough, fruiting laterals may form on any remaining cane portion. These fruiting laterals are not healthy; they are entry sites for insects and disease pathogens. Also, any fruits that form will most likely rot, attracting pathogens and creating a source of disease-conducting material for the late summer crop. All canes that are cut from the planting should be removed from the area and destroyed. In warm climates, the primocane crop can be delayed by mowing the young primocanes a second time when they are approximately 1 foot tall. Pinching the primocanes (removing the growing tip) in July to stimulate growth of laterals will also delay fruiting. This is sometimes done to delay harvest until after the intense heat of July².

Trellising: Brambles can become somewhat unruly in a planting. To keep them neat and simplify harvesting, it is easy to trellis the plants. Consider using a one- or two-wire trellis to keep your brambles under control. For trailing dew berries choose A. For upright blackberry and raspberry plants choose B or C (diagram on reverse side).

¹Texas Fruit and Nut Production: Blackberries, Agrilife Extension

² Pruning Raspberries and Blackberries, Cornell University Department of Horticulture

Bramble Varieties for Central Texas (Thorny or Thornless)

Austin Dewberry: (Thorny) Large, sweet flavorful fruit ripening in mid-June. A trailing plant that may be allowed to ramble across the ground, or trained on a trellis. Good fresh and for cooking.

BLACKBERRIES:

Apache (Thornless) A medium-large berry with sweet, firm fruit ripening in July. An erect plant released from University of Arkansas in 1999. The plant is resistant to rosette disease and orange rust.

Arapaho (Thornless) An upright, disease resistant and very productive plant with firm and tasty medium sized fruit. One of the earliest ripening of all blackberry varieties.

Brazos (Thorny) Large, soft fruit with a tart, acidic flavor ripening in mid-May. Plant is a vigorous grower and heavy producer. Known for good disease resistance and widely adapted to most areas of Texas. Has raspberry and wild dewberry in its parentage. Introduced to the home gardener by Texas A&M in 1959.

Kiowa (Thorny) A very large, flavorful, firm fruit with blocky oblong shape on erect plant, ripening in early June. The fruit is good for fresh eating and cooking. Stores and ships well. Released from the University of Arkansas in 1995.

Natchez (Thornless) Large, delicious, juicy, flavorful fruits that are elongated in shape on an erect plant ripening in early June. Known for high yields and good disease resistance. Released in 2007 from University of Arkansas. Stores well.

Ouachita (Thornless) Large firm fruit, Upright habit, Good disease resistance.

Prime Ark 45 (Thorny) Med-large fruit, producing on 1st and 2nd year growth, Upright growth habit.

Prime Ark Freedom (Thornless) Extra large, firm yet juicy fruit that ripens in July. This variety fruits on first year growth, unlike most other blackberry varieties.

Roseborough (Thorny) Large, juicy fruit with delicious sweet flavor on erect plant ripening in late May. Heavy producer with good disease resistance. Released by Texas A&M University in 1977.

RASPBERRIES:

Heritage (Thorny) Medium size, tart, mild, firm fruit ripening in late August – early September. Good for eating fresh or cooking. Introduced by New York Agricultural Station in Geneva, N.Y. in 1969.

