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# Growing Raspberries & Blackberries

Raspberries can be an enjoyable crop for the conscientious gardener. A well-kept raspberry bed can provide fruit for 10 to 20 years. Red raspberries grow well throughout New Hampshire, but black and purple raspberries and blackberries lack the hardiness to be grown north of well-sheltered areas in southern New Hampshire.

The crowns and roots of raspberry and blackberry plants are perennial, but individual canes live just two years. Each spring plants produce canes from buds on the crown and underground lateral stems. These canes, called *primocanes*, do not fruit, but grow vegetatively during the first season. They overwinter and produce fruit during the summer of the second year. These second-year canes are called *floricanes*. As the floricanes are leafing out, flowering and fruiting, new primocanes emerge to provide a crop for the following year. Second-year canes die shortly after fruiting. *Everbearing* raspberries bear a crop on first-year canes in the fall, followed by a typical summer crop the second year.

## The ideal planting site

- Offers full sunlight all day.
- Has well-drained, sandy loam soil rich in organic matter.
- Dries quickly following rainy periods.

## Avoid

- Low areas that remain wet late into the spring.
- Areas where tomatoes, potatoes, peppers or eggplant have been grown within the past four years, because these crops may increase the potential for soil-borne *Verticillium* wilt.
- Windy sites where desiccation of canes may be a problem.
- Sites near wild raspberry and blackberry plants.

## Preparing the Site

- Have your soil tested. Pick up a test kit at your county Cooperative Extension office or call the Family, Home & Garden Education Center tollfree at **1-877-398-4769**. Raspberries grow best with a soil pH of 5.6 to 6.2 which may require applications of ground limestone.
- Grow a cover crop such as buckwheat, rye, millet or oats, and till it into the soil before it goes to seed. This will boost soil organic matter and help suppress perennial weeds.
- Amend soil with compost, especially if you do not plant a cover crop.
- Order plants early. Purchase only disease-free, virus-indexed stock. Most raspberries are sold as dormant, one-year-old canes, but some nurseries offer plants generated by tissue culture, or micro-propagation. Tissue-cultured plants may be more expensive but less likely to have disease problems.

## In the Spring of the Planting Year

- Purchase your plants from a reputable nursery or garden dealer.
- Fertilize – Spread 25 pounds of 10-10-10 garden fertilizer (or its equivalent) per 1000 square feet of the planting site. Thoroughly mix the fertilizer into the soil before planting.

- Plant early in spring when danger of severe frost is past.
- Set plants at the same depth or slightly deeper than they were at the nursery.
- Firm the soil well around the roots.
- Water the plants thoroughly.
- If one-year-old canes are used cut them back to 6 inches above ground.

### **Training Red Raspberries**

Red raspberry plants are typically grown in a hedgerow. Set plants about two feet apart in rows that are at least 8 feet apart. The plants will soon send up suckers from the roots and crowns to form a hedgerow which is maintained at 12 to 18 inches wide.

All raspberries should be grown with some support. The “T” trellis system is recommended for plants grown in a hedgerow. Pressure treated posts are set every 20 to 25 feet in a row with 3 1/2 foot long cross arms affixed at a height of 4 feet. The posts should be set at least 2 feet deep in the ground and anchored at each end of the row. Secure heavy gauge wire along the length of the row on each side of the cross arms. Tie fruiting canes to the wires on each side to make harvest easier and reduce fruit loss. The “T” trellis also makes pruning easier by encouraging new cane growth to occur in the middle of the row rather than the outside edges.

### **Training Black and Purple Raspberries and Blackberries**

Purple and black raspberries and blackberries only produce suckers from the base of the crown and will not fill out a hedgerow. For this reason, they are frequently grown in the hill system to maximize production from individual plants. Plants in this system are set 4 feet apart in rows at least 10 feet apart.

A sturdy post is set next to each plant. A wire about 4 1/2 feet above the ground can be run connecting all the posts in a row. The fruiting branches of each plant can be attached to the wire, or the canes are simply tied to the post.

### **Maintenance Practices**

- Maintain a weed-free environment by shallow cultivation and hand pulling.
- Water plants thoroughly once a week.
- Mulch is effective in reducing weed problems, conserving moisture, and providing valuable organic matter. Take note that mulched plants may be more susceptible to winter injury as a result of delayed plant hardening in the fall. Spread sawdust, bark, pine needles, or rotted leaf mulch over the plant rows and maintain at a depth of three to four inches.
- Seed low-maintenance fescue grasses between the plant rows in late August the year you plant.
- Fertilize each year in the early spring, preferably mid-April, with 6 pounds of 10-10-10 per 100 feet of plant row.

### **Pruning**

#### ***Pruning Red Raspberries***

- In the early autumn following harvest, remove all canes that fruited that summer.
- During the growing season, remove any new canes that are outside of the 12- to 18-inch row width and all canes that show obvious symptoms of insect or disease damage.
- In the spring before the buds break, thin remaining canes, leaving 5 or 6 of the largest per foot of row.

#### ***Pruning Everbearing or Fall Bearing Raspberries***

Everbearing raspberries are usually managed to produce only one crop in the fall.

- Mow the canes at or near ground level early each spring.
- During the summer, remove any new canes which develop outside of the 16-inch row width.

#### ***Pruning Black and Purple Raspberries and Blackberries***

- After harvest, remove canes.
- For black and purple raspberries, pinch (prune off the top 4 inches) new canes when they reach about three feet in height. Blackberries are pinched when they reach 4 feet. This encourages these canes to form side branches.
- In early spring, thin remaining canes, leaving only 5 to 6 of the largest per hill. Cut side branches back to 12 buds (usually about 12 inches in height).

## **Harvesting Brambles**

Raspberries are ready to pick when they easily separate from the receptacle or core. Blackberries do not separate from the core, so ripeness should be judged by color and taste. All bramble fruit are extremely perishable and should be harvested frequently. To maintain fresh quality, place fruit in shallow containers no more than three fruit deep and cool quickly. Store in the refrigerator for longest life.

## **Cultivars**

### ***Red Raspberries***

- Boyne:*** Early ripening. Large crops of medium-sized, dark red berries of good flavor. Short, spiny canes. Very hardy.
- Kilarney:*** Ripens mid-season. Medium-sized, bright red fruit with good flavor. Short, spiny canes with many fine thorns. Very hardy.
- Lauren:*** Ripens mid-season. Large, flavorful fruits. Has performed well in Durham but needs testing in northern N.H.
- Latham:*** Mid to late ripening. Medium-large fruit, prone to crumbling, with poor to fair flavor. Plants are vigorous with few thorns. Very hardy.

### ***Everbearing Raspberries***

- Polana:*** Earliest of the everbearing types available. Fruits are medium-sized, attractive, with good flavor. Ripens late August at UNH.
- Autumn Britten:*** September 1 in Durham. Large, firm, flavorful fruits.
- Red Wing:*** First week in September at UNH. Medium-sized, good flavor, productive.
- Caroline:*** Has performed well in trials at UNH. Very large fruits with good flavor. Ripens early September at UNH.

### ***Purple Raspberries***

- Royalty:*** Late ripening. Large, round reddish-purple fruit are soft with good flavor. High yields. Vigorous canes with thorns. Moderately hardy.

### ***Black Raspberries***

- Jewel:*** Mid-season ripening. Firm, glossy fruit with good flavor. Vigorous, erect plants. Moderately hardy.

### ***Blackberries***

- Illini:*** Large, glossy fruit with good flavor. This is a vigorous, erect plant with large thorns. It will take over without vigilant containment. Hardy to -25°F.

*Fact sheet developed by William G. Lord, UNH Extension Fruit Specialist  
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