



BLACKBERRIES

Blackberries, native to North America, are now available in thornless varieties, which make picking all the easier. The plants will yield some fruit in the first year, and within a few years you could be harvesting 10–20 pounds of fruit per plant. Compared to fruit trees, that's a much quicker crop, so getting some berries in soon is worthwhile!

ENJOYING THE FRUIT

Blackberries are not only incredibly delicious but also healthy for you. Like other berries, they are full of antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Especially high in vitamins C and K and in manganese, blackberries carry anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties that researchers believe may play a role in numerous health benefits, from improving digestion to helping combat cancer. Low in calories and less likely to spike blood sugar levels as compared to other fruits, they're also being researched for managing diabetes.

Blackberries, of course, are super tasty raw and right off the plant. Try tossing them on a salad or mix them into a smoothie! Many also like to cook them up into pies or jams or as topping for ice-cream.



CHOOSING A SITE

Blackberries like full sun, well-drained soil, and humidity. They will tolerate more acidic soil, with a pH from 5.8–7.2, so they work well next to blueberries.

PLANTING

To plant, dig a hole, saving the topsoil; loosen the soil at the bottom of the hole. Blackberries prefer soil rich with organic matter, so dig in some compost and add 1 quart of bone meal. Space 3–4 feet apart. Water weekly as plants are getting established.

Blackberries make a good hedge plant, placed 3 feet apart in a row. Try to keep grasses from invading by sheet mulching or planting in a raised bed or along a sunny garage wall.

You can trellis blackberries by setting two posts joined by wires at 3 feet and 5 feet and then weaving the canes or tying them on. You can also grow them in stations with a stake in center and tie canes on in a few places up the post.

New canes will come up at base of the crown. Unlike raspberries, they won't send up suckers feet away.

TAKING CARE: WATERING, FEEDING, PRUNING

Pay close attention to watering when blackberries are flowering and fruiting. Be sure they are getting 1–2 inches of water each week.

Be ruthless when it comes to thinning and pruning. If you are, you'll more likely have healthy and abundant canes. Also be sure to weed out wild blackberries because they can introduce viruses.

Don't fertilize when planting; wait until your plants are well-established.

Because the different varieties of blackberries thrive with different methods of pruning, check out the instructions from Nourse Farms in Deerfield for all the pruning specifics you'll need:

<https://noursefarms.com/news/post/bramble-pruning-weve-got-your-back/>.

AVOIDING PESTS AND DISEASE

Blackberries are susceptible to Orange Rust disease, which produces bright orange pustules on the leaves in spring. Dig up any infected plant and remove/destroy immediately. If you see Orange Rust in summer or fall, don't worry, because that's a different disease that won't do damage.

Don't plant blackberries in places where potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, strawberries or eggplant have recently been grown, because these crops can carry Verticillium, another root rot fungus that can infect brambles.

HARVESTING

Wait until blackberries are dull black to pick. They should drop off in your hand with little effort when they are ripe.

CONSIDERING SPECIFIC VARIETIES

You can find erect and semi-erect varieties. If you have minimal space, choose an erect type.

TRIPLE CROWN

This semi-erect, thornless variety has excellent flavor, is super productive, and very vigorous. It produces fruit in late summer and continues for 4-6 weeks. The berries are large, sweet, juicy, and abundant.

SWEET-ARK PONCA

New on the scene from a breeding program at the University of Arkansas, this is one of the sweetest and easiest-to-grow varieties. It's erect and thornless.

PRIME-ARK FREEDOM

Also from the University of Arkansas program, this one is a favorite with commercial and backyard growers. It's a prolific, erect, thornless plant producing tasty berries.



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