



PRIMOCANE-FRUITING or FALL-BEARING BLACKBERRIES (*Rubus spp.*)

Please remove your fall-bearing blackberry canes from their box as soon as possible. You have received dormant canes that have not leafed out yet. We recommend transplanting outside as soon as possible. If you are not able to transplant them outside right away, store in a cool location (32–40°F/0–4°C), and keep roots damp.

Blackberries are related to raspberries, but unlike raspberries retain their core when picked. Most blackberries are not very cold-hardy but we offer disease-free, dormant canes of **Prime Ark® Freedom**. This is a primocane-fruiting variety, also known as fall-bearing, that can be successfully grown in northern areas. It bears fruit on first-year canes — primocanes — once the plants are established.

LIFE CYCLE:

Perennial in Zones 5–9. Suitable for Zone 5 but grows best in Zones 6–9.

SITE SELECTION:

Blackberries thrive in well-drained soil, in a sunny, open location. A slightly sloped area that encourages good air and water movement is desirable. Many disease and environmental problems can be minimized by planning ahead and planting in the appropriate site. Soil that remains water saturated can result in winter injury or disease problems. If your site is poorly drained, consider using raised beds. A fertile soil with a pH of 6.5–6.8 is optimal.

PLANTING:

Adequate spacing is important for best yields. Beds should be 3 feet wide, with paths between the beds a minimum of 8 feet wide. This spacing allows the plants to fill in the bed, and allows room for mowing equipment in the paths. The paths can be planted with grass or other cover crops such as clover or can be mulched with bark or straw. Space plants 3–4 feet apart in the row. Spread the roots laterally from the stem when planting, and cover with ½–1 inch of soil.

WEED CONTROL:

Weed control for blackberries is very important for optimal yields and plant health. We recommend that you plant your blackberries in an area that has already been tilled and weeded — preferably an area previously planted with a cover crop for suppression of perennial weeds. After planting, cultivate weekly to control weeds while the blackberries are establishing themselves. Mulching with straw or bark is one method of controlling weeds, especially during the first year.

PRUNING:

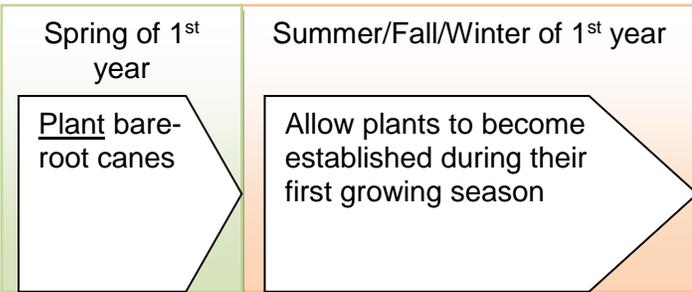
Proper pruning is important to ensure a successful blackberry harvest. Two pruning methods, standard pruning and tipping, are required to encourage the plants to develop lateral growth, greatly increase yields, promote earlier berry production, and maintain a more manageable plant habit.

Standard pruning: Allow the plants to become established during their first growing season. In early spring of the following year, anytime after the first of the year in northern climates, prune all canes within a few inches of ground level. Leaving a few inches above ground makes it clear in the spring where each plant is located, and allows you to avoid mowing or trampling them.

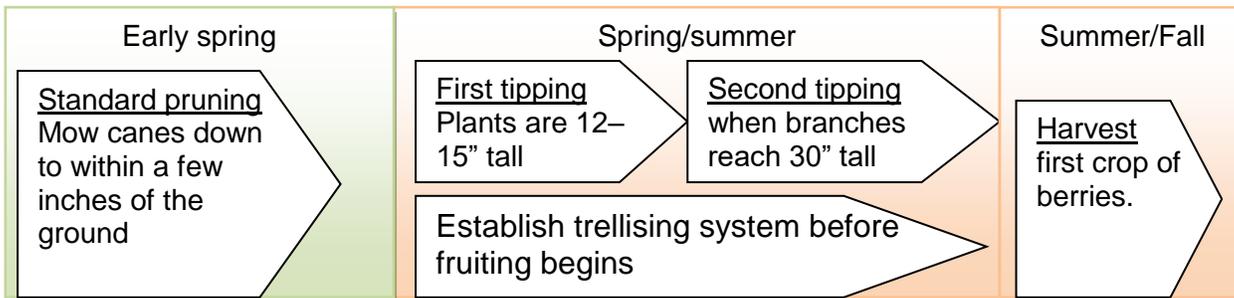
Tipping: Allow new growth to reach 12–15 inches in height, and then remove the top inch of the canes. This can easily be accomplished just by pinching off the tips of the canes, which are tender, with your fingers. Canes can be tipped a second time once they reach a height of approximately 30 inches.

Repeat standard pruning and tipping steps every year after the first year of establishment.

Planting and growth: first year:



Pruning and harvest: second and subsequent years:



DISEASES AND PESTS:

Blackberries are susceptible to a number of insects and diseases. Johnny’s offers a technical sheet titled Raspberry Pests and Diseases that also applies to blackberries. You may request that it be sent to you, or visit our website (johnnyseeds.com) to view or print a copy. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Service or a raspberry culture guide for more information.

TRELLISING:

A good trellising system can improve yield and ease of harvest. For small plantings, a temporary trellis can be erected for use during the fruiting season. Sturdy posts set at the end of the bed with twine or wire run between the posts will help keep the canes upright.

Trellises for larger plantings should have posts with 6 feet above ground, set 25 feet apart in the middle of the row. Run twine or wire between the posts at several height intervals (usually about every foot) starting at about 30 inch above the ground. Train the canes between the wires or attach canes to wires as they grow.

HARVEST:

Primocane varieties will bear a small crop during their 1st year, with full yields beginning the 2nd year. Fruiting will occur starting in late summer and lasting into fall. Blackberries for fresh eating are almost always harvested by hand, as they do not ripen uniformly enough to machine harvest. Keep berries cool after harvest, and be careful not to crush them. Blackberries are stored easily by freezing whole.

More information may be found at Cornell University. (2008). Raspberry & Blackberry Production Guide for the Northeast, Midwest, and Eastern Canada. Cornell Fruit. Retrieved from: http://host31.spidergraphics.com/nra/doc/Fair%20Use%20Web%20PDFs/NRAES-35_Web.pdf