

Primocane-Fruiting (Fall-bearing) Blackberries (*Rubus spp.*)

Plant right away. Remove your fall-bearing blackberry plants from their box and plastic liner as soon as possible. You have received disease-free dormant plug-size transplants. Blackberry plants typically hold their leaves, even when dormant. We recommend transplanting outside as soon as possible.

If you are unable to transplant them right away: Check moisture level of plug-cell soil; it should be damp. Place the transplants back inside their box and store in a refrigerator or a cool location for up to 1 week at 32–40°F (0–4°C). Keep plug-cell soil damp.

Blackberries are related to raspberries but unlike raspberries, blackberry fruits retain their core when picked. Most blackberries are not very cold-hardy, but the variety we offer, **Prime Ark® Freedom**, can be successfully grown in northern areas. Once the plants are established, this variety bears fruit on its first-year canes — primocanes — a trait found in some brambles that is referred to as “primocane-fruiting” or “fall-bearing.”

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 plot that encourages good air and water movement is desirable. Many disease and environmental problems can be minimized by planning ahead and planting at an appropriate site. Soil that remains water saturated can lead to winter injury or disease problems. If your site is poorly drained, consider planting in 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' wide, with paths a minimum of 8' wide between beds. This spacing allows the plants to fill in the beds as well as allowing room for mowing equipment in the pathways if needed. The paths can be planted with grass or other cover crops, such as clover, or mulched with bark or straw.

Space plants 3–4' apart in the row. Transplant the plugs deeply enough to cover plug soil with ½-1" of garden soil. Irrigate well after transplanting and maintain good moisture levels until plants are well-established or for 4–6 weeks after transplanting.

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 getting established. Mulching with straw or bark is an effective option for 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. A schematic representation of the recommended pruning schedule for primocane (fall-bearing) blackberries is shown below (page 2).

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 to within a few inches of ground level. Leave a few inches above ground so you can see where each plant is located, and to avoid mowing or trampling them.

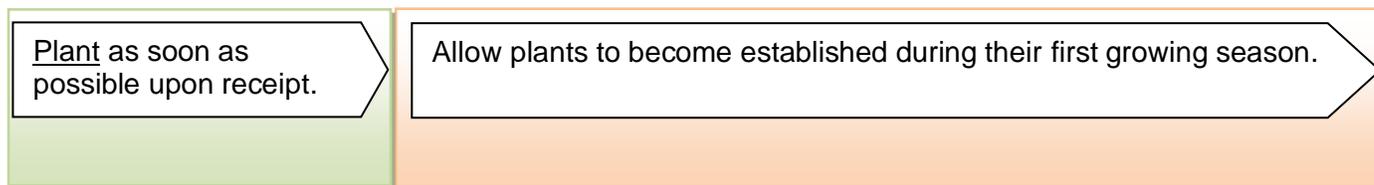
Tipping. Allow new growth to reach 12–15" in height, then remove the top 1" of the canes. This can be accomplished by simply pinching off the tender tips of the canes with your fingers. Canes can be tipped a second time once they reach a height of approximately 30".

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

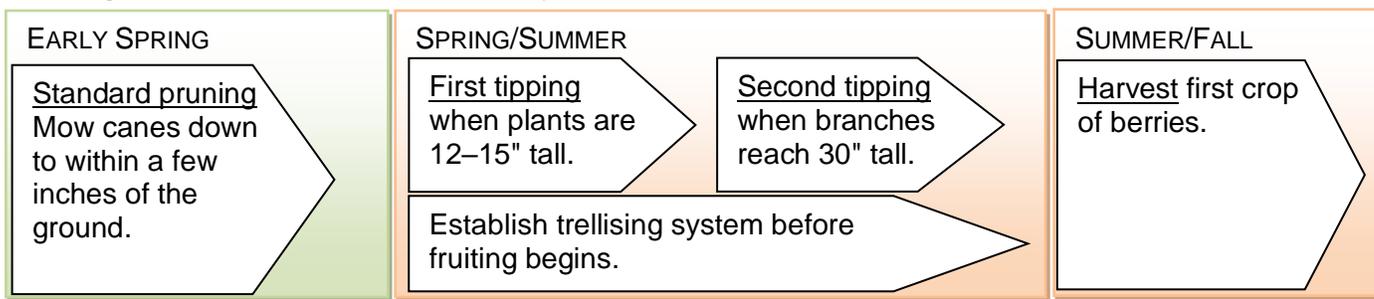
HARVEST

Primocane varieties will bear a small crop during their first year, with full yields beginning the second year. Fruiting will begin in late summer and last into fall. Blackberries for fresh eating are almost always harvested by hand, as they are delicate and do not ripen uniformly enough to machine harvest. Keep berries cool after harvest, and be careful not to crush them. Blackberries can be stored by freezing whole.

Planting & Growth — Year 1



Pruning & Harvest — Year 2 & Annually Thereafter



TRELLISING

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

Trellises for larger plantings should be supported by posts standing 6' above ground, set into the center of the rows, and spaced 25' feet apart. Run twine or wire between the posts at several height intervals (usually about every foot), starting at about 30" above ground level. Train the canes between the wires or attach canes to wires as they grow.

DISEASES AND PESTS

Blackberries are susceptible to a number of pests and diseases. To learn more, see our [Raspberry Pests and Diseases Tech Sheet](#), which also applies to blackberries. Contact your local Cooperative Extension service or a raspberry culture guide for more detailed information.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

New York State Integrated Pest Management Publication No. 228. 2021. Organic Production and IPM Guide for Raspberries and Blackberries. URL: <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/42889.3/2022-org-rasp-blackberry-NYSIPM.pdf> (accessed 01.23.2023).

TunnelBerries.org/USDA-SCRI. 2019. High Tunnel Production Guide for Raspberries & Blackberries. URL: <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/fruit/pdfs/high-tunnel-brambles.pdf> (accessed 01.23.2023).

Bushway, L.J., et al. 2008. Raspberry and Blackberry Production Guide for the Northeast, Midwest, and Eastern Canada (NRAES-35). URL: <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/66930> (accessed 01.23.2023).