

Cane Fruit

Raspberries are easy to grow, and everyone knows that there's nothing like the taste of that first raspberry of summer. On the other hand, freshly picked, fully ripe boysenberries, loganberries and marionberries have delectable flavours seldom experienced except by those who grow their own plants; the fresh berries are so soft that they cannot be shipped.

VARIETIES OF CANE FRUITS

In early spring we carry boxes of bare root cane fruits, and among the raspberry and blackberry hybrids are a wide range of other cane fruits. Despite their many names, botanists consider all of these berries to be hybrids of blackberries and raspberries. The additional names were coined by an enterprising nurseryman years ago and, in the process, confused generations of gardeners who sought out these "wonder" berries, thinking them to be of some exotic species. Yellow raspberries are mutations of red varieties and are like them except for colour.

Everbearing raspberries, such as the cultivar 'Heritage' generally lack the subtle flavour of the summer varieties, but produce both an early-summer crop on the previous season's growth and a fall crop on the current season's growth.

Some cane fruit plants are stiffly erect bushes growing 1-1.5 meters (4 to 5 feet) tall, while others are trailing vines that must be tied to a support to keep the fruit off the ground. Both types are alike, however, in that their canes grow one year, then bear fruit and die the second year. Each summer new canes are produced; these will bear fruit the following year. Nearly all blackberries are notorious for their thorny canes, although a few thornless varieties exist; they are much easier to work among, but generally bear small crops. Cane fruit plants are long-lived, usually bearing fruit for as long as 20 years, and are extremely prolific.

CULTURE OF RASPBERRIES

Raspberries grow best in well-drained soil of pH 5.5 to 7.0 that has been supplemented with compost or manure. Raspberries should never be planted where eggplants, peppers, potatoes or tomatoes have grown within three years, because they are susceptible to soilborne diseases associated with such plants.

Prepare the soil in your cane fruit patch by digging in well-rotted manure or garden compost a few months before planting time. Also ensure good drainage. Cane fruits will not tolerate the wet conditions present in many of our gardens. If need be, grow them in a raised bed.

If plants are to be grown in rows, set red and yellow varieties about 1m apart in rows about 3-4m ft) apart; set black and purple varieties 1m apart in rows 8ft apart. If raspberries are to be grown as clumps or hills, space the red and yellow varieties 2m apart and the black and purple ones 2m apart. Water in well. After planting, cut the canes to 5cm above the ground; leave the stubs to mark the rows until new sprouts appear from below the ground.

Let the young canes of summer-fruiting red and yellow raspberries grow undisturbed until their second spring; when the buds begin to show green tips, remove all but two or three healthy canes per foot of row. Hill plants should have all but six to eight canes removed. Cut the tops of the canes that will bear fruit to a height of 1m.

While everbearing red and yellow raspberries will bear two crops a year, such production puts a great strain on the plants. It is best to cut the canes of everbearers to the ground late in the fall instead of in the spring or early summer, allowing them to make unrestricted growth during the summer so as to produce a heavy fall crop. To prune black and purple raspberries, snip off the tips of the new canes in midsummer when they are about 1m tall. This will cause them to send out laterals, or side branches, that may more than double fruit production the following year. In the spring remove all but three to six strong canes and cut back the laterals to about 20cm. Each of the buds on the laterals will bear several clusters of berries. Cut away the fruitproducing canes as soon as they finish bearing.



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CULTURE OF BLACKBERRIES

The culture of bush and vine types differs considerably, primarily because of their habits of growth.

Set bush-type plants 1m apart in the row and space rows 2m apart. Cut back the canes of newly planted bushes to 15cm from the ground. During the summer, mulch with 15cm of old hay or 10cm of wood chips, sawdust or ground bark. When the new shoots that grow during the summer reach a height of about 1m, cut off the tips of the stems to force the development of side branches. Late in the following spring after flower buds become visible, move weak canes and thin others to stand about 25cm apart. Then reduce the length of the side branches to about 50cm; the buds on the remainder of the side branches send out stems that produce white flowers that are followed by fruit in midsummer. While the previous season's growth is producing fruit, new stems are growing for another season's crop; cut off the tips of these canes. Late in the summer after the fruiting season has passed, cut out and destroy all canes that have borne fruit

Vine-type blackberries should be planted 1m apart in rows 2m apart; cut back newly set plants to 15cm from the ground and mulch as described above. During the first season allow the vines to creep along the ground until they are 2m long; then cut off the tips to force the development of side branches. During the summer or early in the following spring, install posts at 5m intervals along the rows and nail two strands of galvanized-iron wire from post to post at different heights. The vines can be tied to the wires during the summer where winters are mild. In spring cut off all but 16 canes from each plant, and tie them in bunches of four to the wires. Cut back side branches to 30cm, and as with bush-type plants, remove fruit-bearing canes after the season has passed.

FERTILIZING

Feed cane-fruit plants in early spring by scattering **GARDENWORKS™** Fruit and Berry Food around them at the rate of 1kg per 2m of row. For organic gardeners, use rock phosphate at a rate of 250g per row, scratch into the soil lightly, and top dress with 2.5cm of well-rotted manure or garden compost. Use dolomite lime to provide calcium and sweeten the soil in April.

HARVESTING

Raspberries are ready for harvest when the berries separate easily from the stems. To pick berries, gently pull each ripe fruit between the thumb and forefinger; it will drop into your cupped hand. Handle the berries carefully and do not pile them into a deep container, for they crush easily. Do not wash or wet them because the water dilutes their flavour.

Blackberries, tayberries, boysenberries and loganberries should be harvested in midsummer when the berries are so ripe that they drop off at the slightest touch. Unripe berries or those allowed to sit in the sun after picking have a bitter taste.

PROPAGATION

Red and yellow raspberry plants propagate themselves, spreading by underground suckers. If new plants are not wanted, pull out the suckers. Cutting them off only causes more suckers to grow. To get new black and purple raspberry plants, use the method called tip layering: cover the tips of the arching stems in the late summer with a shovelful of soil—a new plant will start to root at that spot in the spring. Cut off the tip, dig up the rooted plant (which may or may not yet show growth above ground) and replant it elsewhere.



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