

CMG GardenNotes #762

## Growing Blackberries in Colorado Gardens

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In blackberries, the receptacle (white core of the fruit) is part of the fruit when picked. In raspberries the receptacle remains on the plant when picked.

### Types and Cultivars

**Training blackberries** produce vigorous *primocanes* (first-year vegetative cane) from the crown of the plant rather than roots. Second year *floricanes* produce long shaped fruit with relatively small seeds and a highly aromatic, intense flavor. They are not hardy in climates like Colorado experiencing damage at temperatures of 13°F in mid winter, and in the 20s°F in late winter/early spring.

**Erect blackberries** have stiff arching canes that are somewhat self-supporting. However, they are much easier to handle when trellised and pruned. Summer prune or tip primocanes to encourage branching and increase fruit production on the second-year floricanes. Plants can become invasive to an area as it can produce new primocanes (suckers) from the roots.

Erect blackberries produce fruit with relatively large seeds. Flavor and aroma are not considered as intense as in the training blackberry cultivars. They are semi-hardy in climates with rapid springtime temperature shifts, like Colorado.

Primocane-fruiting cultivars of erect blackberries produce fruit on the new canes. This make management easier as the canes can be cut to the ground each winter. Suggested cultivars include *Prime Jan* and *Prime Jim*.

**Semi-erect blackberry** plants are thornless and produce vigorous, thick, erect canes from the crown. No primocanes are produced from the roots (suckering). Prune primocanes in the summer to encourage branching and increase fruit production on floricanes. A trellis is required to support the canes.

Semi-erect blackberries generally produce a higher yield than trailing or erect types. Fruit quality is similar to that of the erect blackberries. Suggested cultivars include *Triple Crown* and *Chester Thornless*.

Figure 1. Blackberries

**Blackberry/red raspberry hybrids** are generally natural crosses between blackberries and raspberries. Because the receptacle (white core) comes off with the fruit, they are generally considered a type of blackberry. Popular cultivars include *Boysen* (Boysenberry), *Logan* (Loganberry), and *Tay* (Tayberry).



## Planting and Care of Blackberries

Blackberries produce best in full sun, but are tolerant of partial shade. They are more tolerant of clayey soils than raspberries. However, good drainage is essential. Because blackberries may last for 10 to 15 years, extra attention to improving the soil organic content to 5% gives big dividends.

For semi-erect cultivars, space plants five to six feet apart. Space erect cultivars two to three feet apart. Space training cultivars four to six feet apart. Start with certified disease-free nursery stock. Planting would be similar to raspberries. To reduce virus problems, do not plant blackberries adjacent to raspberries.

Irrigation, fertilization, and pest management would be similar to raspberries. Refer to *CMG GardenNotes* #761, **Growing Raspberries in Colorado Gardens**.

## Trellising and Pruning

Trellising is recommended for all blackberries.

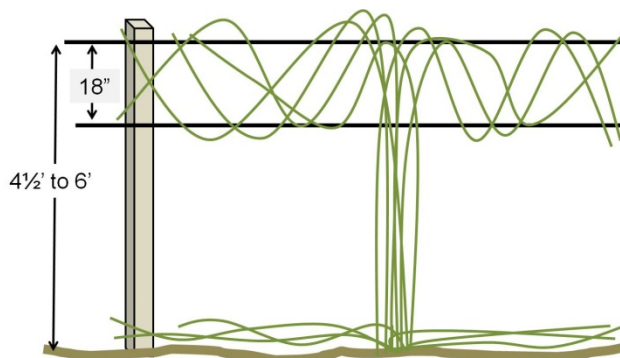
**Trailing blackberries** are easy to grow on a two-wire system. Run a top wire at five to six feet with a second line 18 inches below the top wire.

After the first year, there will be fruiting floricanes along the wires. Train the new primocanes into a narrow row below the fruiting canes. Directing all canes in one direction may make it simpler.

After the fruit harvest period, the old fruiting (floricanes) are removed. However, unless there is a lot of disease, it's best to delay removing the old fruiting canes until they have died back considerably. This allows the dying canes to move nutrient back into the crown and roots. After old fruiting canes are removed, train the primocanes up on the wires. Work with one or two canes at a time in a spiral around the trellis wires. Canes from adjacent plants may overlap a little. No pruning of primocanes is necessary.

In area with low winter temperatures, leave the primocanes on the ground for the winter where they could be mulched for winter protection. In the spring, after damage of extreme cold has passed, train the old primocanes (now floricanes) up on the wires. Avoid working with the canes in cold weather, as they are more prone to breaking. [Figure 2]

Figure 2. Two wire trellis for trailing blackberries. Spread floricanes up on a two-wire system.

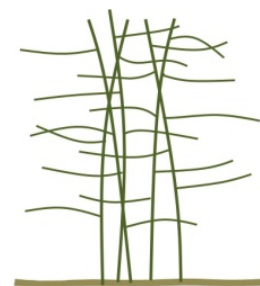


**Erect blackberries** produce stiff, shorter canes that come from the crown and root suckering (forming a hedgerow). A T-trellis works well to support erect blackberries.

Erect blackberries require summer pruning. Remove the top one to two inches of new primocanes when they are four feet tall. This causes the canes to branch, increasing next year's yields. This will require several pruning sessions to tip each cane as it reaches the four foot height. Primocanes (suckers) that grow outside the hedgerow should be regularly removed.

In the winter, remove the dead floricanes (old fruiting canes) from the hedgerow. Also shorten the lateral branches to about 1½ to 2½ feet. [Figure 3]

Figure 3. Pruning of erect blackberries after winter pruning.



**Primocane-fruiting erect blackberries** – For best quality fruit, cut all canes off just above the ground in the late winter. In the summer, when the primocanes are 3½ feet tall, removed the top 6 inches. The primocanes will branch, thereby producing larger yields in the fall.

**Semi-erect blackberries** are vigorous and easier to manage on a Double T Trellis. Install four-foot cross arms at the top of a six foot post. Install a three-foot cross arm about two-feet below the top line. String high-tensile wire down the rows, connecting to the cross arms.

Semi-erect blackberries require summer pruning. When the primocanes are five feet tall, remove the top two inches to encourage branching. This will require several pruning sessions to prune canes as they reach the height.

In the winter, remove the dead floricanes (old fruiting canes). Spread the primocanes (new floricanes) out along the trellis. Canes do not need to be shortened. However, they can be if they are difficult to train.

### **Additional Information** – *CMG GardenNotes* on Small Fruit

- #760 References and Review Questions: Small Fruits
- #761 Growing Raspberries in Colorado Gardens
- #762 Growing Blackberries in Colorado Gardens
- #763 Growing Strawberries in Colorado Gardens
- #764 Growing Grapes in Colorado Gardens

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