

Growing Raspberries & Blackberries

Raspberries and blackberries may look alike at first glance, but they're easy to tell apart once picked raspberries leave behind a hollow core, while blackberries keep their solid, spongy center. Blackberries are typically larger, glossier, and more tart, while raspberries are smaller, softer, and tend to be sweeter. Both are compact, high-yielding plants that thrive in the Pacific Northwest's climate. Just be sure to avoid planting them near any plants in the nightshade family, which can spread soil-borne diseases.

Blackberries

Ideal Conditions

Blackberries thrive in the cool, moist climate of the Pacific Northwest, particularly in western Washington. They prefer full sun and well-drained soil, ideally with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. In areas with heavier or poorly drained soils, consider planting blackberries in raised beds or using a soil mix designed to improve drainage and root health.

Planting Instructions

Plant blackberries in early spring, while the canes are still dormant. Dig planting holes 3 - 4 feet apart for trailing varieties, or 2 - 3 feet apart for erect types. Position the root crown slightly above the soil line and backfill with nutrient-rich, well-drained soil. Water thoroughly after planting to establish strong roots. For upright varieties, provide trellises or stakes to support growth and keep the plants upright.

Watering & Fertilizing

Blackberries need consistent moisture during their growing season, especially when the fruit begins to form. Water deeply but avoid waterlogging the soil. In early spring, apply a balanced fertilizer (ex. 10-10-10) or organic alternatives, such as compost or well-aged manure, to nourish the plants for a healthy harvest.

Care & Maintenance

To conserve moisture and control weeds, apply mulch around the base of the plants. Prune blackberries in early spring, removing any dead or weak canes to encourage new growth. A trellis or support system will keep plants neat and promote better air circulation. Regularly inspect for pests and diseases like aphids or cane blight, addressing issues promptly to ensure healthy fruit production.

Benefits

Blackberries are typically ready to harvest in late summer to early fall. Berries should be fully ripe, black, and come off the plant easily when gently pulled. Harvest every 3 - 5 days, depending on ripening, and refrigerate them immediately to preserve freshness.

Raspberries

Ideal Conditions

Raspberries are well-suited to the Pacific Northwest, thriving in full sun while tolerating light shade. They grow best in light, well-drained soil with a pH between 5.5 and 7.5. In areas with heavier soils, plant raspberries in raised beds (8 - 10 inches high) or ridges (12 - 18 inches high) to prevent root rot and improve drainage.

Planting Instructions

Plant in early spring while the canes are still dormant. Dig holes 2 - 3 feet apart for individual plants, or create rows spaced 6 - 8 feet apart. Plant canes are about one inch deeper than they grew in the nursery and amend the soil with compost or well-aged manure. Water thoroughly after planting to help establish strong roots.

Watering & Fertilizing

Keep soil evenly moist, especially during the first growing season. Raspberries are heavy feeders, so apply balanced fertilizer (such as 10-10-10) three times between early spring and midsummer. Organic fertilizers and composted manures are excellent options for long-term soil health in edible gardens.

Care & Maintenance

Mulch around the base of plants to conserve moisture and reduce weed competition. Support raspberries using a trellis, post, or stake system to keep canes upright and encourage air circulation. Prune annually in early spring: remove spent floricanes (canes that already fruited) and thin out weak or overcrowded primocanes (new growth). Regular monitoring for pests and fungal diseases like rust, cane blight, or root rot is important, early treatment ensures healthy yields.

Harvesting

Raspberries are typically ready to pick from mid-July through early fall, depending on the variety. Berries are ripe when they come off the cane easily and are fully colored. Harvest every 3 - 6 days to keep up with ripening fruit. Pick only dry berries and refrigerate them promptly to extend freshness.

Raspberries Varieties

Summer-bearing (Florican)

Boyne	Early season, cold-hardy with sweet, soft berries.
Cascade Bounty	Large, firm berries with excellent flavor; high yields.
Chilcotin	Productive mid-season variety; good disease resistance.
Encore	Late season with firm, large fruit and good shelf life.
Honey Queen	Yellow-gold raspberries; very sweet and flavorful.
Jewel	Popular black raspberry with rich flavor.
Latham	Old favorite, cold-hardy with classic raspberry flavor.
Meeker	Washington's standard; sweet, juicy and productive.
Nova	Mid-season, cold-hardy with firm berries and mild flavor.
Royalty	Large, sweet berries with floral notes.
Tulameen	Large, glossy fruit with superior flavor; good for fresh eating.
Willamette	Early bearers with dark red, tangy berries.

Everbearing (Primocane)

Amity	Medium-large fruit with excellent flavor and firmness.
Autumn Bliss	Early primocane variety with rich red berries.
Caroline	Large, flavorful berries; high-yielding and vigorous.
Crimson Night	Dark red to purple fruit with rich, sweet taste.
Fallgold	Unique golden raspberry; soft, very sweet fruit.
Heritage	Classic everbearer; firm berries with good flavor.
Polka	Large, flavorful fruit; good for fresh or processing.
Prelude	Early-fruiting; small, sweet berries with bonus summer crop.

Blackberry Varieties

Thornless

Apache	Large, sweet berries on upright, thornless canes.
Baby Cakes	Compact, dwarf habit ideal for containers; sweet fruit.
Black Satin	Mid-season berries with smooth, mildly tart flavor.
Chester	High-yielding, late-season with firm, glossy fruit.
Loch Ness	Thornless, firm, and flavorful berries with an excellent shelf life.
Triple Crown	Vigorous grower; juicy, sweet, and large berries.

Thorned

Boysenberry	Juicy, tangy-sweet hybrid of raspberry, blackberry, and loganberry.
Darrow	Upright, cold-hardy with very large, flavorful berries.
Loganberry	Raspberry-blackberry cross with tart, aromatic fruit.
Marionberry	Popular in Oregon; rich, complex flavor and soft texture.
Olallie	Large, juicy berries; similar to marionberry with good firmness.

Good Companion Plants for Raspberries & Blackberries

Chervil	Deters ants and aphids from canes.
Comfrey	Feeds the soil and helps retain moisture.
Garlic & Onions (Alliums)	Repel aphids, mites, and beetles.
Marigold	Natural pest deterrent and helps improve soil health.
Yarrow	Attracts beneficial insects and deters pests.

Plants to Avoid Near Raspberries & Blackberries

Boysenberries & Other Brambles	Increases the risk of pest and disease transfer.
Gooseberries & Currants	Can carry <i>white pine blister rust</i> and other fungal issues.
Tomatoes, Potatoes, Eggplants (Nightshades)	Can spread <i>verticillium wilt</i> , a soil-borne disease deadly to berries.