

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen March 24, 2023

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Growing Raspberries and Blackberries

Berries are a delicious and healthy summer snack! They can be hard to find at the grocery store so they make a great addition to your fruit garden or home landscape. The plants are called brambles and will begin to bear fruit a year after planting. They are an easy plant to care for and a wonderful high producing fruit. Here are some tips to grow berries in Kansas:

Brambles grow best in a well-drained soil that holds moisture- preferably a deep sandy loam with plenty of organic matter. A deep soil encourages deep rooting and increases drought tolerance. Additional water is needed most summers to maintain plant vigor and improve fruit production and quality. Mulch can be added around plants to conserve moisture and modify soil temperatures. Protection from strong winds will reduce cane breakage and increase fruit production. A soil analysis requested through your local extension office will identify required nutrients. Regularly fertilized garden soil may not need nutrients until plants begin bearing. Fall tilling is recommended to avoid having to work soil under wet spring conditions.

Weather conditions should be considered when selecting brambles and cultivars (varieties). Black and purple raspberries can be grown in all areas of Kansas. Extremely low temperatures can kill blackberry canes. Subzero temperatures damage plants severely, especially thornless and trailing types. The surviving plants will send up new canes, but with the exception of fall-bearing varieties, plants will not bear fruit when existing canes die. Brambles are self-fruitful and only require one cultivar for pollination. Certified virus-free stock should be purchased when possible. Raspberries and blackberries can be summer-bearing or fall-bearing

(everbearing) types. Summer-bearing cultivars bear fruit on two-year-old canes that die when done fruiting. Fall-bearing varieties bear fruit on first-year canes but later in the season. Fall-bearing varieties bear a second time on two-year-old canes.

For blackberries try varieties such as Shawnee, Choctaw, Osage, Prime Ark Freedom or Lucretia. For raspberries choose Heritage, September, Lathan, or Taylor. For purple raspberries try Amethyst or Brandywine.

Hold plants in a bucket of water when planting to keep roots from drying out. Set red and yellow raspberry plants 2 to 3 inches deeper than they were growing in the nursery container and other brambles about an inch deeper. Spread the roots in the planting hole, firming the soil over them. Red raspberries should be set about 2 feet apart in the row, in rows 6 to 8 feet apart. In hills, set plants 5 to 6 feet apart in each direction. Black and purple raspberries need more space than reds and are usually set 3 feet apart in the row in rows 8 to 10 feet apart. Hill spacing is about 6 feet by 6 feet. Erect blackberries should be spaced the same as black and purple raspberries, whether planting in rows or hills. After planting, cut back canes of red raspberries to 8 to 12 inches. Cut back blackberries to about 6 inches. Pruning techniques vary depending on berry type. Stop by the Extension Office for a publication on pruning brambles.

When harvesting, fruit color and ease of separation are the best indicators of maturity. Full color often develops before berries separate easily. Size and flavor will be reduced if picked too soon. For peak quality, harvest berries every 2 to 3 days, but avoid picking when berries are wet. Pick berries by gently lifting with your thumb and finger. Cool fruit within an hour of picking to minimize moisture loss, fungal growth, and slow breakdown. Berries will maintain quality for several days if cooled to around 32°F within an hour of picking and held in a refrigerator or cooler around this temperature.

If you have never tried growing berries, give it a go this growing season! If you have any questions on how to grow berries in your garden, or other landscape or gardening questions this spring contact any Post Rock District Extension Office.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at cthiessen@ksu.edu or by calling the Beloit Office (785-738-3597).