

BLACKBERRIES

The blackberry is a small bushy vine, each berry being a cluster of tiny black knobs. The blackberry is well adapted and easy to grow. Blackberries are biennials and begin bearing the year after planting. That second year they can bear about 8 gallons per 100 feet of row. Plants may produce for 15 years.

Soil

Blackberries grow best in sandy soil; however, they can be grown in soils have good drainage, and a pH range of 4.5 to 7.5. On alkaline soils, plants may experience severe iron chlorosis. If internal soil drainage is not fast, grow blackberries in a raised bed.

Planting

Planting is usually done from root cuttings during the dormant season. Root cuttings are pieces of root about the size of a pencil. They are laid horizontally in the ground about 2 to 4 inches deep and 2 to 3 feet apart in the row. Dormant bare root blackberry plants may also be planted during the winter. Plants should be spaced 2 to 3 feet apart in rows 8 to 12 feet apart. Nursery plants in containers can be planted at any time of year, although early spring is best and watering will be critical.

Pruning

Pruning is used to maintain an orderly planting and to control diseases. Long handled loppers are best for pruning blackberries. During the first year, growth is sprawling and does not need topping. Although blackberry roots are perennial, tops are biennial, meaning that berries only grow on 2-year old canes. Prima canes are produced the first year and produce rapid vegetative growth. Cut these prima canes back when they reach 36 to 48 inches to encourage branching. Floricanes are the second year of the biennial cycle and bloom in March. The fruit ripens in May. After fruiting, the floricanes will die and should be cut to the ground. To make picking easier, some gardeners hedge the rows to a 4 foot height and a 3 foot width, while others train the canes onto a vertical trellis. Every 3 years mature plants need to be cut to the ground to remove diseased wood and rejuvenate growth.

Harvest

The fruit should be picked every 3 days to obtain a maximum sugar content. The storage life is only one day without refrigeration. Few crops are as easy to grow and as rewarding as blackberries; however, it is easy to plant more than what can be pruned, kept weed-free, and irrigated.

Recommended Varieties for Parker County

Brazos	The standard in Texas for 35 years. Healthy canes produce a high yield of large fruit. Acid-flavored fruit is better for cooking.
Rosborough	Large fruit sweeter than <i>Brazos</i> and yields are often higher.
Womack	Yields similar to <i>Rosborough</i> , but fruit are smaller. It does best on deep, sandy soil.
Shawnee	Large fruit late in the season. Fruit is soft, so they do not ship nor store well.
Choctaw	Medium-large soft fruit. Seed size is small.
Brisson	Fruit is very large and similar to <i>Rosborough</i> .
Humble	Medium sized, low acid, unusually sweet berry and is resistant to Double Blossom.
Arapaho	Medium sized firm, high-quality fruit. Very productive and is resistant to both Double Blossom and Rust. No other variety offers this many positive characteristics.
Navaho*	Firm, medium sized, sweet berry. Difficult to establish from root cuttings, but produces a dense hedgerow. It ripens later than <i>Arapaho</i> , but yields are usually higher.
Hull*	Medium sized fruit that has an acid flavor if not fully ripened to a dull, black color.

* *Thornless*