

Raspberries

Nothing caps a summer evening better than a raspberry cobbler heaped with vanilla ice cream. Or sprinkle the ripe berries on cereal for a morning treat. Homemade jam is always a welcome gift, too. Because of their delicious uses and ease of growing, the perennial raspberry ought to be in every garden.

Varieties

The most commonly grown raspberry is the red. But the purple and black types make interesting variations on the raspberry theme. All can be grown in most parts of the country, and all are self-fertile. The most popular red varieties are Fallred, Hilton, Indian Summer, Latham, Newburgh, New Heritage, and Thornless Canby. For black raspberries, try Bristol, Allen, Black Hawk, or Morrison. Purple varieties include Clyde, Amethyst, Sodus, and Purple Autumn. Some, such as Latham, are termed everbearing because when pruned properly they will provide two yields per season.

To make the most of your raspberry patch, check with your nursery or county extension office to make sure the variety you want to buy will thrive in your area. Resist the free offerings of well-intentioned neighbors who appear on your doorstep with a handful of seedlings culled from their own patches. The small amount of money you may save is not worth the risk of diseased plants.

Planting

Moisture and plenty of rich organic matter in the soil are essentials. It pays to grow a high cultivation crop, such as any of the root vegetables, the year before in order to get the ground in proper condition. When deciding on a location, look for a spot that gets some protection from the blustery cold winds of winter. To improve the soil's ability to retain moisture, work in plenty of well-rotted manure or sphagnum peat moss.

Set bushes in the ground as soon as you bring them home from the nursery. If roots appear dried out, soak them in water for an hour or two before planting. Red raspberries can be planted two or three inches deeper than at the nursery; black and purple varieties should be planted at the same depth. Space plants three feet apart and rows five to eight feet apart.

Care and feeding

After canes have been set out, cut back central canes to a height of six inches. Then mulch to conserve moisture. Also, keep the hoe handy so weeds can be nipped before they invade the row. Remember, though, that deep hacking with the hoe can do considerable injury to shallow raspberry roots.

Like blackberries, raspberries need a thorough going-over with the pruning shears to maintain some semblance of order. When plants are dormant in early spring, remove weak and spindly canes. Then remove any suckers that have grown up between rows. Ideally, rows should be no more than about 12 inches wide so that berries are always accessible and plants benefit from good air circulation. If properly pruned, raspberry canes are self-supporting. Head back your black raspberry varieties to 18 to 24 inches; purple and red varieties, to 30 to 36 inches. The amount and the quality of the fruit will be greatly improved if lateral branches are trimmed back to at least four to six buds. Finally, after the harvest is in, remove all old, spent canes, and destroy them.

If your winters are especially deadly for fruit-bearing plants, you can overwinter raspberry canes by bending them gently to the ground and covering them with a deep layer of mulch. Then when the warm winds of spring return, remove protective mulch, and allow canes to return to their normal upright position again.

Most growers like to keep raspberry rows open and fruit accessible by training the canes to grow within a trellis arrangement constructed of

posts and wire. Plants may be grown between double wires or merely tied to a trellis or single wire.

Insects and diseases

Raspberries are hardly immune from disease and insect attack, but problems will be few if you practice good garden hygiene. Purchase only healthy, disease-resistant plants from a trustworthy nursery or garden supply center. And make sure the variety grown is the right one for your weather zone. Because weeds can lead to an assortment of miseries, keep area clean and mowed. Make sure, too, that old canes are removed and destroyed so insect larvae and fungus spores don't overwinter. If a plant appears doomed because of disease, remove it immediately so other plants aren't infected.

Harvesting

As berries approach ripeness, they change color rapidly. Check the raspberry patch each day. A deep red color on red varieties and a dull coating on others means harvest time has arrived.