Blackberry summer care

Blackberries are native to Florida and are easy to grow. Recently developed, improved blackberry cultivars have resulted in increased interest by gardeners. These larger, sweeter berries are not the blackberries that we grew up picking along roadsides and in neglected fields.

Blackberries are also excellent plants for attracting and keeping wildlife on your property. Many species of birds and mammals find shelter and food in a blackberry patch. The habit of growth and density of these plants is also ideal as nesting sites for song birds.

Blackberries are usually divided into two different categories, trailing and erect. Erect blackberries have an arched self-supporting cane. Trailing blackberries have canes that are not self-supporting and must be placed on a trellis for support. Trailing types are often called dewberries.

Although most blackberries produce shoots with thorns, many cultivars are thornless. For a complete list of cultivars and their characteristics, visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS104.

Depending on the type and cultivar, your blackberries will typically bloom in February or March, and the picking season can range from April through July.

Summer pruning of blackberries is an important management tool. It is helpful in fruit harvesting, controlling insects and controlling diseases.

Even though blackberry plants are perennial, living for many years, individual canes are biennial, only living for two years.

In the spring, blackberries send up new shoots from the existing crown or buds formed on the roots. These new canes are called primocanes. Primocanes produce no flowers or fruit the first year. The second year these canes are called floricanes. Floricanes are the canes that flower and produce fruit.
Floricanes gradually dry up and die after fruiting. It is advisable to prune out and remove all floricanes at the ground level after fruiting. Because of our long growing season and the possibility of a build up of diseases or insects, it’s best to remove them immediately after harvest.

After removing the floricanes, top the new primocanes. This simply means to remove about 6 inches of growth from the tip. This is typically done when the primocanes reach a height of 3 to 4 feet. Topping the primocanes in the summer promotes self-supporting plants and encourages lateral branch development, which increases fruit production the following year.

Because of some diseases that may exist on the older canes, it is especially important to disinfect your pruners between every cut. Dip your pruners in rubbing alcohol between cuts. Remember to let the alcohol dry before making a fresh cut.

It is also important to practice good sanitation and remove the pruned debris from the property.

Prune trailing blackberries by selecting the best four to eight canes and tying them to supports. Remove extra primocanes and old fruiting canes.

Another summer task is to apply fertilizer. Blackberries do not require much fertilizer in most soils. Also, blackberry roots run close to the soil surface and excess fertilizer can burn leaves or even kill plants.

A 10-10-10 fertilizer with micronutrients is generally recommended. The fertilizer can be applied in an 18-inch ring around the plant.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: [http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension](http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension)