

Blackberries are a hardy, no-fuss berry crop that provides baskets full of tasty, nutrient rich fruit with little effort. The Himalayan (“wild”) blackberry grows like weeds next to roads and along trails here in the PNW, a testament to blackberry’s vigorous nature and suitability for our climate. Varieties carried by Sky are less invasive but equally hardy and delicious. Honestly, what more can you want in a berry?

CARE INSTRUCTIONS

All of the blackberry varieties that Sky carries are cold hardy to at least -5°F; some are even hardier. Blackberries will grow vigorously in almost any type of soil, often with little or no fertilizer. If production seems to have decreased, you can apply a flower or vegetable fertilizer around bloom time. A steady moisture supply is necessary, especially in sandy soils that don’t retain moisture. Keep your blackberry planting clean to eliminate weed competition and sucker growth. However, avoid cultivating deeply around thornless varieties; if the feeder roots are damaged, they will send up thorny suckers that will need to be pruned out.

BLACKBERRY GROWTH 101

The crowns of blackberry plants are perennial: new canes arise from them every year. The canes themselves are usually biennial; each one lives for two years. During the first year, they grow and send out laterals (side branches). The second year, small branches grow from buds on the one-year-old canes. Fruit is borne on these side branches. After fruiting, the entire cane dies, and new canes sprout next year from the root.

TRAILING & SEMI-TRAILING VARIETIES

Trailing varieties should be planted 8 to 12’ apart. They do best trained to a 2-wire trellis, the upper wire 5’ above the ground, the lower one about 3’ above the ground. Prune back blackberries in late summer after they have fruited by removing the old canes that have been harvested. Then, thin the new canes, leaving 6 to 12 of the sturdiest to bear next season’s fruit. **IMPORTANT: DO NOT PRUNE** the tips of the canes on trailing varieties – that’s where they will bear their fruit.

The semi-trailing varieties such as tayberry can be planted closer together, usually 4 to 7’. These varieties can be left to trail, or they can be trained like a black raspberry: when each cane is between 4 and 5’, **DO PRUNE** the tip to encourage lateral branches to grow. The following spring, cut the laterals back to 12-18 inches. The main canes should then be tied to a wire trellis for support.

TRADITIONAL BLACKBERRY VARIETIES (HAVE THORNS)

Boysenberry Very large, non shiny, dark maroon berries. Soft, very juicy flesh; almost seedless. Distinctive rich tangy flavor and aroma. Excellent for fresh eating, freezing, jams, pastries, juice, syrup, and wine. Ripens in July. Vigorous vines. Hardy to -20° F.

Marionberry Medium to large, firm, bright shiny black berries with sweet rich flavor reminiscent of wild blackberries. Recommended for fresh eating, preserves, and desserts; the most commonly grown variety. Vigorous thorny plant with strong canes, best trained on wires. Long ripening period from July to early August.

Obsidian Blackberry Bred for flavor and productivity, this variety has both marionberry and boysenberry in its lineage to give it a sweet complex flavor. Thorny vigorous vines.

THORNLESS BLACKBERRY VARIETIES

Black Satin Sweet and juicy blue-black berries on a semi-upright thornless plant. Great for hotter locations. Long black berries are firm, sweet, and flavorful.

Columbia Giant The largest berries ever, on a trailing thornless plant. Long black berries are firm, sweet, and flavorful. OSU introduction.

Columbia Star Large sweet juicy berries. Blackberry crossed with marionberry for excellent flavor berries on a trailing thornless plant. OSU introduction.

Columbia Sunrise Firm medium to large purple to black berries are sweet and delicious. Very early ripening, on a trailing thornless plant. OSU introduction.

Thornless Boysenberry Very large, non shiny, dark maroon berries. Soft, very juicy flesh; almost seedless. Distinctive rich tangy flavor and aroma. Excellent for fresh eating, freezing, jams, pastries, juice, syrup, and wine. Ripens in July. Vines grow 5' tall; less vigorous than regular (thorny) boysenberry. Hardy to -20° F.

Thornless Loganberry Large light red berries that do not darken when ripe. Unique tart flavor; makes excellent pies or wine. Thought to be a wild cross between a blackberry and a red raspberry. Ripens in August and September. Trailing habit. Hardy to -20° F.

Triple Crown Extremely vigorous and productive thornless plants can grow 15' long, produce 30 pounds of berries at maturity. Or prune and trellis it to keep it smaller. Berries are large and shiny with a superb sweet flavor.

THORNLESS PATIO VARIETIES

Baby Cakes® Thornless. Perfect in containers or small areas. The canes are upright, requiring no support, and grow only 3-4' tall. The berries are large and sweet with true blackberry favor. In our region, Baby Cakes will bear a summer crop and often a second one in the fall.