



Urban Harvest  
Gardening for good.

## Blackberries

Category:	Temperate; partly deciduous
Hardiness:	Easily withstands freezes
Fruit Family:	Brambles with aggregate fruits
Light:	Full sun; will tolerate light shade for part of the day
Size:	5'-6'H x 4'-8'W average if unpruned; usually pruned to 4'-5'H x 3'W
Soil:	Moist, well-drained, high organic content preferred
Planting:	Container grown berries may be planted year round with proper care

Blackberries are easy to grow anywhere in southeast Texas. They require only a minimal amount of care a few times each year. Homegrown berries are tastier than those from the market because they are picked and eaten right off the vines at peak ripeness. One well cared for, irrigated plant of the right variety can produce a gallon of berries if protected from birds. Five to ten plants will produce a large crop with little effort. Blackberries have no pollination problems and no weather concerns provided they are watered during droughts. Thorny varieties are much more productive than thornless varieties and thorns are of little concern on a well-managed vine.

### Care of Blackberry Plants



**Planting:** Plant blackberries in full sun or partial sun and in a location that does not experience standing water for any length of time. You can plant them in rows, every three to four feet, with six to eight feet between rows or you can plant them in spots all over your site provided you have a four-foot diameter circle for them and the thorns won't snag passersby.

Blackberries are sold either in pots or as bare root plants. If they are bare root, plant them as soon as possible after purchase which will be during their dormant season in January and February. Keep the roots moist by covering them with damp soil or mulch until you are ready to plant; never allow the roots to dry out. Dig a hole or trench several inches deep and wide enough to accommodate the roots. Make a mound of soil in the center of the hole. Spread the roots out evenly over the mound. Hold the crown of the plant at soil level. Backfill with the native soil – do not amend it.

Containerized blackberries may be planted at any time, but will establish more easily if planted in late winter or early spring. Dig a hole that is twice as wide as the container, and the same depth as the root ball. Break up the soil you removed from the hole, but do not amend it. Set the root ball in the hole

and backfill with the unamended soil. In all cases, water well after planting and apply an inch of leaf mold compost around the plant. Mulch with native mulch, pine straw, or well rotted leaves.

**Pruning & Training:** To avoid a difficult to harvest briar patch, the canes of each plant should be gathered and tied to a metal stake or sturdy wire trellis. Blackberry canes should be tipped back when they reach 4'-5' tall to promote growth and fruit production. Once the side branches reach 18" in length, they also should be pinched or headed back. This keeps the branches at right angles to the plant, rather than drooping and snagging on lower branches. This horizontal growth will be where your berries will be produced.

**Production:** Blackberries will begin producing the year after planting. Blackberries produce on floricanes; one-year old canes that grew from the roots during the previous spring and summer. If you had good growth you will get a lot of berries. If growth was weak, production will be poor. Once these canes have produced their fruits and been harvested, the old canes will die. New canes, called primocanes, will sprout from the base. Cut out the dying canes in June or July, leaving the new canes to grow. Commence training and pruning them just as you did the previous season.

**Watering:** The first summer after planting, check soil moisture 1-2 times per week and do not let the soil go dry. Blackberries appreciate regular irrigation, but do not like soggy soils. They will tolerate short periods of drought.

**Fertilizing:** Apply 1/4 pound of slow release organic fertilizer per plant in February before spring growth begins and again in June after when the old canes are cut back and new canes are actively growing. This is a couple of handfuls broadcast around the roots of each plant.

**Harvesting:** Blackberries are not fully ripe until about two days after they turn black. They will start to lose their glossiness and are beginning to soften. If they take some effort to pull off the stem, they are not quite ready. Even one day can make a difference in sweetness and flavor. Harvest daily. It is easiest to cup your hand under a berry and use your thumb to coax it off them stem. A berry at peak ripeness will easily separate and fall into your hand. If picked unripe, blackberries will turn reddish when they are frozen. Use these berries for jams or pies.

**Pests:** Birds are the chief pest of blackberries. You can set up a framework of wire, PVC, or wood around your plants to support bird netting. A determined mockingbird will breach the toughest net. If you have the room, plant one bramble for the birds. This will sometimes help to keep them occupied so they will leave your netted brambles alone.

**Propagation:** After a few years, blackberries may send up new plants 3'-6' from the mother plant. These are easily rooted out in late winter for planting elsewhere or for sharing. If you do not wish to increase your numbers, they can be mowed down or dug out.

## Varieties of Blackberries for the 2016 Sale

### *Kiowa*

## Varieties of Blackberries for the Houston Area Climate

**Kiowa:** Produces one of the largest berries of the Arkansas varieties. Large quantities of outstanding flavorful berries are produced for about six weeks on thorny, but easily manageable canes. *'Kiowa'* blooms earlier and longer than other blackberries. Blooms are large and often tinged with pink. Berries are over 10% sugar and are nearly 50% sweeter than the old Texas standard *'Brazos'*. *'Kiowa'* berries have relatively small seeds. Without pruning, this very thorny variety grows 5-6' tall with a 4-8' spread. This variety is one of the best. **300 chill hours**

**Tupi:** A 1982 hybrid of the upright US variety *'Comanche'* and a wild trailing variety from Uruguay. It is the main variety grown in Mexico and well adapted to the southern U.S. It is the variety frequently found in supermarkets here in winter. *'Tupi'* produces large fruits with small seeds having black and uniform coloration and a perfectly balanced flavor that hovers between acidity and sugar. It is a thorny, upright plant. The fruit has a good flavor and has similar sweetness to that of *'Kiowa'*, but berry size is somewhat smaller. **200 chill hours**