



Blackberries for Texas

Information provided by Little Red Nursery LLC
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SOIL

Blackberries grow best in well-drained sandy or loamy soils with a pH of 4.5 to 7.5. If the pH is any higher, plants will suffer from a mineral deficiency called iron chlorosis (interveinal yellowing), which necessitates making an annual application of chelated iron to the soil or foliar sprays of iron sulfate every three to four weeks. If your soil is poorly drained, build a raised bed at least 1ft high filled with rich organic material mixed with sand.



PLANTING

Dormant bare-root blackberry plants should be planted during the winter. Containerized plants can be planted any time of year, although early spring is best. Space plants 3ft apart in the row. Space rows 10ft to 12ft apart to facilitate harvesting.

PRUNING

Although blackberry roots are perennial, the canes are biennial. The plant produces vigorous new growth called prima canes the first year. Cut prima canes back after they reach 3 to 4ft tall to encourage lateral branching. The second year, the plant produces fruiting canes called floricanes. The floricanes die after producing fruit and should be cut to the ground at that point.

FERTILIZATION

Nitrogen is usually the only nutrient that needs to be applied to the soil. Apply Tru Organic Blood Meal in small, frequent amounts in a band along the row, beginning at bloom and finishing after harvest. Requirements for phosphorus, potassium and other nutrients vary and should be based on soil tests. Avoid using phosphorus fertilizer on soils with a pH above 7.5. Excess phosphorus will tie up iron in the soil and cause iron chlorosis.

IRRIGATION

Supply irrigation to newly planted and established blackberry plants. Drip irrigation through a soaker-type hose works best. You can bury the line alongside or under each row. However, clogged lines usually necessitate replacing the soaker tubing in 3 to 5 years. You can also place the soaker tubing on top of the ground beside the plants and cover it with mulch. Start irrigation in March or April as needed and gradually increase to a maximum level in July. Reduce watering by September to slow new growth and to harden off the canes. Irrigate occasionally during the winter if the soil becomes dry.

WEED CONTROL

Your best bet, of course, is to eradicate weeds and grasses with a glyphosate herbicide before you plant your blackberries. After planting and laying soaker tubes, mulch 2in to 3in with hay, rotted wood chips or shredded leaves to inhibit weed growth.

DISEASES AND INSECTS

Rosette, double blossom or witches broom is the most serious fungal disease in East and Southeast TX.

Anthraxnose is a fungal disease that produces small purplish spots on canes and leaves. The spots on the leaves turn white and drop out, leaving a shot-hole appearance. Chemical control involves spraying cupric hydroxide in the spring when leaf buds are just beginning to open. Follow by spraying with Captan when flower buds appear and after petals fall.

Orange rust is a fungal disease that produces masses of orange-colored spots on leaves in the spring. The variety 'Humble' is especially susceptible. Remove and destroy infected plants.

Spider mites might feed on leaves during hot summer weather. Foliage will appear whitish or stippled. Apply sprays on insecticidal soap or ultra-fine horticultural oil to the undersides of leaves.



CONTAINER GROWN

Before planting, carefully loosen the roots all around the root ball. If the plant is root bound use a knife or shears to loosen up the root mass on sides and bottom. Place the plant in the prepared hole being sure the root flare is slightly above ground. Begin filling in around the plant with the amended soil. Water well before the hole is filled to remove air pockets then water again when the planting is complete. Apply no more than 2" of mulch on top of the root ball being sure it does not touch the bark of the plant.

WATERING

Do not allow your plant to dry out. Adjust your watering to your specific climate. During summer/dry weather, water deeply two or three times a week, slowly soaking the area around the plant to a depth of 4". Do not over water. If the soil is wet, do not add water. It can be beneficial to contain water by creating a slight "well" around the plant so the water can't run off. Once the plant is established or prior to heavy rains, return soil around the plant to natural grade so the plant does not drown in a mini pond.

FERTILIZING

If you desire to fertilize, make sure to use a starter or slow release or organic product, ensuring protection for tender new root growth. In the spring of the following season, a fertilizer for mature plants may be used if your soil requires additional nutrition. Never allow fertilizer to contact plant foliage as it may burn the plant and cause severe dieback.

