

Berries

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Many gardeners are no longer satisfied with a vegetable patch and a flower border. They are turning to small fruits and orchards to landscape their homes and to diversify their garden produce. These research findings will help make your berry gardening fruitful.

If you grow highbush blueberries, you are probably aware that some removal of old canes is necessary to keep the bushes vigorous and productive. Research quantifies and confirms this recommendation. Researchers compared the results of removing middle-aged canes, oldest canes, and a mixture of the two, and found that removing up to 40 percent of the oldest canes produced the largest berries and the most new shoots. So get out those pruners this fall and thin out those bushes.

For simple harvest and a higher yield of summer-bearing raspberries, try a V-shaped trellis instead of the traditional I-shaped trellis. Form the trellis by setting two posts to form a 60-degree, V-shaped angle. Fasten wires at 2 feet and 3 1/2 feet from the ground. The highest yield was obtained in one study when the fruiting canes were tied to both sides of the V, and primocanes which would fruit the next year were allowed to grow vertically in the center of the V. After harvest, the fruiting canes were pruned out and the primocanes split and tied to both sides of the V. A simpler pruning system consists of tying all fruiting canes to one side of the V and primocanes to the other. The fruiting canes can then be easily removed after harvest. Yield is somewhat lower than for the method that splits the fruiting canes, but still is higher than for an I-shaped trellis.

Planting more than one variety of blackberry may boost your yield. Some varieties are self-incompatible, producing smaller berries when self-pollinated than when cross-pollinated. It seems this trait is associated with diploid varieties; if you happen to know that you have a tetraploid variety, you probably need to grow only the one variety for good production.

Day-neutral strawberries are becoming more popular with gardeners in Virginia. One reason for their growing popularity is their continual flowering and fruiting habit. Unlike "ever-bearing" strawberries of the past that produced a June crop followed by a sparse autumn crop, day-neutrals truly are ever-bearing, producing fruit throughout the summer. As such, they require different culture than June-bearers or ever-bearers. The exact length of time for which day-neutral berry plants should be deblossomed in their first season of

growth has not been determined; research suggests that deblossoming newly set plants for 6 to 8 weeks will increase first-year yields by increasing fall yields. Photosynthate that would otherwise go into producing spring fruit is diverted into producing more leaves on deblossomed plants, leading to the higher overall yields.

Whether you grow day-neutrals, ever-bearers, or traditional June-bearing strawberries, you'll probably get greater early yield by covering your patch in late fall (mountain regions of Virginia) or early winter (coastal areas) with a floating row cover. No mulch is necessary. Remove the covers at first bloom.

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