

Blackberries

Marlow Shubert

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Angelina Master Gardeners

Blackberries are one of the easiest fruits to grow in east Texas. The berries ripen in May and June and are delicious on cereal, ice cream, and in cobblers. Besides they are packed with nutrients that reduce the risk of some cancers and heart disease. I am planning to plant blackberries this winter, so I asked fellow Master Gardener, Marlow Shubert, for suggestions.

Marlow wrote this: "I have loved blackberry cobbler since I was a boy, so it only stands to reason that I raise blackberries. We started out a few years ago with the old reliable Brazos, a variety developed by Texas A & M more than 40 years ago. Brazos blackberries are good but they have thorns that are bad. They really stick you!

Several years ago thornless, upright varieties of blackberries were developed that are also disease resistant. I waited a few years, and three years ago, I planted two kinds of the thornless blackberries, the Arapaho and the Apache. Marty Baker, a horticulturist from the Texas A & M Research station in Overton, 'You'll like the Apache better, but you'll also like the Arapaho, because of their production'. He was right. The Arapaho blackberries ripen earlier and produce more fruit, but the Apache blackberries produce bigger and sweeter berries.

The good thing about planting both varieties is that the Arapaho ripens first, and just as they finish producing, the Apache blackberries begin. We have fresh blackberries

for several weeks from our 48 plants. They produce far more than we can use so we give them to our church folks. Plant about a dozen plants for a family of four. Blackberry plants will multiply and there will be more plants in a year or two. When the thornless berries started producing, I dug up the old thorn type and burned them! I certainly don't plan on going back to those old "thorns" reaching out and grabbing me every time I pass by!"

Marty Baker, in an article, "Texas Blackberries", on Aggie Horticulture Website had these recommendations for blackberries: He listed 10 varieties of blackberries. The advantage of the thornless, erect varieties such as Arapaho, Apache and Navaho is they do not require support and have improved disease resistance to "Double Bloom", or "Rosette", a serious fungal disease of blackberries in east Texas

Soil: Blackberries grow best in sandy soil. Here in Angelina County, be sure to use a raised bed with soil at least one foot deep.

Watering: Both new and mature plants will need water weekly. Consider burying a drip irrigation line when planting. Reduce watering in September to allow hardening. If winters are very dry you may need to occasionally water then.

Planting: Bare root plants may be planted during the winter, and plants in containers are best planted in early spring. Space 2-3 feet apart.

Pruning: The first year after planting growth will be sprawling. Blackberry roots are perennial and their tops are biennial. Berries grow on the second year canes, and after berry production those canes will die and should be cut to the ground. The first year canes may also be cut back to 36-48 inches to encourage branching.

Fertilization: is limited to nitrogen, applied in small frequent amounts in a band along the row when the plants begin to bloom.

Weed control: Mulch the beds with pine straw or chopped leaves to control weeds.

For more information, call the County Extension Office at 634-6414.

Also, visit the Texas A & M website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/tamuhort.html>