



## Prune raspberry and blackberry canes to bolster productivity

There's nothing quite as tasty as a raspberry or blackberry cobbler or pie made from fresh berries you've picked right from the vine. For those gardeners who grow these sweet treats, it's important to prune the fruiting canes to maintain productivity.

Raspberries and blackberries are the most well-known brambles. While not a scientific term, the word bramble is used to describe certain members of the rose family. What makes a plant a bramble is the presence of thorns, typically an edible fruit that grows on biennial canes and belongs to the *Rubus* genus. Some bramble bushes grow wild in some areas, but some are cultivated for their fruit crops, including raspberries and blackberries.

The life cycle of brambles is interesting in that the individual crowns and root systems can live for many years. The fruiting canes, however, arise from the crown each year and live for just two years. In the first year, the canes are called primocanes. It's during this time they grow to their full height. In the second year, the canes bear fruit and die. The fruiting canes are called floricanes. It's during the winter season that primocanes become floricanes.

Wintertime is the best time to prune the dead floricanes as this will improve the health of the plant. These canes will appear gray or lighter brown compared to the newer canes which are reddish in color. It's important to remove any canes that have insect galls or cane borer damage.

Gardeners may find their plants with too much new growth. In many cases, some of this new growth will need to be thinned out so the fruit doesn't become overcrowded

Trimming or thinning the floricanes will increase air circulation and allows more sunshine on the canes so they dry quicker. This helps discourages disease development and it also makes harvest easier.

Start with trimming the short, spindly canes that have completed the second growing season to ground level. When making cuts, prune just above a bud rather than below. When canes are tipped just below a bud, the remaining section of the cane is more prone to disease problems.

Any diseased portions of the plant that are removed should be disposed of or burned rather than composted to avoid spreading disease.

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