

Bramble Variety Review – Management Considerations

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Before making the decision to purchase a variety, I often ask growers what their goals are. Do you want something for wholesale, retail, or pick your own? Do you want summer production, fall production, or both? Will you produce berries with or without protected structures and/or trellis? Where are they located, in the cold of zone 3 or the heat of zone 7? These questions will allow me to suggest a variety to fit their situation and should be considered in the selection process.

As a new premise to the selection process, there are several primocane varieties that offer very good summer production with the normal fall season production. These varieties are true everbearers and are the first I recommend for high tunnel production. There are also some varieties sold as summer bearers that produce a late fall harvest. The variety Prelude is a great example.

Trellis systems can boost production by 20-30% and the swing arm trellis can help blackberries grow in more northern climates. Research has shown that planting blackberries in a real greenhouse will help facilitate survival through the winters in zones 3, 4 and 5. High tunnels with trellis can double production potentials for all varieties.

Consequently, just choosing a variety because it tastes good will not always deliver successful results. It is very important to know your soil, starting with a soil test. As with all raspberries, planting in a rich well drained soil with drip irrigation will yield the best results. Too many raspberry growers still plant on flat beds, raised beds are always superior for any variety.

Trellising is not an expense, it is an investment. On average, a good trellis and pruning effort will yield 50% more berries. Like most things in life a little extra effort will yield more successful harvests.

Nourse Farms will offer over 20 varieties of Raspberries for 2012 including Red, Gold, Black, and Purple. We will also offer 8 varieties of blackberries. In the time allotted today, we will explore about half of the selections offered, starting with our top ten sellers

Before beginning I want to be sure everyone understands the following terminology.

Primocane - a perennial raspberry that bears fruit on first year canes. Also known as everbearing, they can produce berries the following summer on canes that survived the winter. While berries are produced, not every variety will yield fresh market quality.

Florican – a perennial raspberry that bears fruit the second year of cane growth that survives the winter. I will discuss ways to help plants survive the winter in my pruning presentation tomorrow.

Commercial Everbearer – a primocane variety that produces two marketable crops per year.

Prelude is a late producing primocane variety that we treat as a florican. Many growers have been surprised by its abundant fall harvest especially during a late fall. Some would consider it a commercial everbearer. We top this variety at or below the lowest fruited spur before winter. This variety is a top seller because it is the earliest producing florican, starting by June 25th for us. I recommend this variety to be planted as 20-30% of a summer raspberry planting.

It finishes before Encore begins. The berry can be soft, especially during high temperatures and if it is not picked every other day. Prelude performs in many climates, it is subject to winter damage in zone 4.

Nova is also a very late primocane that we treat as a florican. This is the most widely adapted raspberry variety we sell. The start of harvest usually coincides with the first sweet corn harvest (hint to vegetable growers) during the first week of July. Berry production is very good with firm fruit. While I personally prefer Lauren, I plant this variety because I can almost guarantee a harvest every year.

Encore is a late season florican with great winter hardiness. In the Mid West, growers have struggled with this variety on heavy soils. The fruit is very large, firm and has great flavor. Encore continues to be one of my best producers and is highly recommended.

Octavia is our latest variety that bridges the gap from summer to fall production. This variety has a large berry with good flavor. The final harvest was in the second week of August. While some growers have been discouraged with its winter hardiness, many growers were satisfied. This variety may not be as flavorful as Taylor, but it will out produce it.

Jewel black raspberry leads the pack of black raspberries. Pruning and trellising has helped us achieve yields almost as good as red varieties. We have also seen our biggest berries on shorter laterals. This is a variety that needs to be replaced by the 8th season that means planting replacements the 6th or 7th season. The season is short for this variety, season extension with Bristol and Mac Black is recommended.

Triple Crown is considered the best tasting blackberry variety. Unfortunately, it doesn't like our New England winter low temperatures. Regular harvests occur in zone 6 or higher. I recommend this variety be planted on a swing arm trellis or a small greenhouse. This variety ripens ten days to two weeks before Chester.

Natchez blackberry has indicated similar winter hardiness to Triple Crown and picks 1-2 weeks earlier. This thornless variety is the earliest, biggest berry and has great flavor. A great choice for a swing arm trellis or greenhouse planting. This one will wow all of your customers.

Chester blackberry is the most winter hardy thornless variety. It is very productive and will produce to Labor Day and slightly beyond. The best flavor occurs when fully ripe which is slightly beyond what I would consider wholesale quality.

Anne is the only golden variety we offer, but is capable of fruiting as a Commercial Everbearer. Summer and fall harvests of the largest best tasting golden raspberries will occur with a little extra effort. They are susceptible to botrytis and need regular fungicide applications. On hot days, we try to pick the berries in the morning.

Heritage is a great old variety, but it is the last variety I would recommend for New England growers. Since we switched, our sales increased 20% because other primocane varieties begin ripening 3-4 weeks earlier.

Polana is the earliest primocane we offer. Many growers have struggled to get it to grow taller than 3 or 4 feet. I still recommend that growers apply a double shot of nitrogen through June. We have seen our best results with the combination of fertigation and dry fertilizer with slow release nitrogen. A grower in Washington showed us plants that were over 6 feet tall. The bigger the plant grows, the larger the berry size and yield. I like to prune the rows back in the fall after picking most of the berries off the edges of the rows.

Autumn Britten is one of the most disease resistant raspberry plants. It has always been a favorite for flavor and firmness, its yield is much less than most new primocanes. Many growers consider this variety a Commercial Everbearer. It doesn't like heavier soils.

Caroline picks a week earlier than Heritage and is twice the size. It has great flavor and yield. To reach its full yield potential, it should be planted in zone 6 or higher. If exposed to high summer temperatures and it is not drip irrigated the first few pickings will give crumbly berries. Floricane harvest also tends to be crumbly. While I recommend all raspberries be trellised, this one must be trellised.

Joan J has very yield potentials, but it must be trellised and thinned. The top trellis wire should be at least 50-60 inches high. Our new trellis had the highest yield, the highest of the 4 wires was 72 inches. I would also suggest trying a double T trellis. Joan J's berries are large and flavorful with a very smooth texture. They will get very dark if not picked every other day, this would be of concern for those selling to super markets. As a commercial everbearer it has a lot of potential, I'm not sure it will always overwinter in zone 5 or lower. This variety is a great choice for tunnel production. It is susceptible to late rust.

Polka is one of our newest primocane varieties with great potential. Berries are large and firm with good flavor. It is one I recommend to replace Autumn Britten. In many growing areas, it is a favorite to grow in tunnels. I believe it has the potential to be a Commercial Everbearer. The planting will get too thick and must be thinned to maintain berry size.

Prime Ark® 45 is quickly being recognized to be a high performing primocane blackberry. It is not thorn less, but the spines are modest compared to other thorny varieties. As Prime Ark® 45 ripens later in the season than either Prime Jim or Prime Jan. it is not adapted to as northerly areas, but a excellent candidate for tunnel production. We have publicized the proper tipping procedure for both Jim and Jan. Prime Ark® 45 also needs to be tipped, but the timing and the procedure is different to achieve the best performance. The very large sized berries and great blackberry taste mark Prime Ark® 45 to be a great performer.