

**Pruning Raspberries and Blackberries - Summer Pruning for increased plant health,  
Fall pruning to prevent winter damage.**

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For over five years, we have reduced winter damage in summer brambles by late fall pruning. Pruning the plant mass reduces the surface area of the plantings, decreasing winter damage due to plant desiccation. I have seen virtually no winter damage in our summer red and black raspberries. Most recommendations suggest it is better to wait until spring and prune off the winter damage in summer bearing brambles. I believe that decreasing the amount of cane the plant has to support, increases the chances it has to survive the winter.

According to Kathy Demchak at Penn State University:

“In certain situations, such as when cane diseases are an issue, it may be more valuable to remove the floricanes along with the disease inoculum on them, and improve air circulation. This is especially important for growers who are growing under low spray, no-spray, or organic systems where cultural controls to manage diseases take on critical value.”

At Nourse Farms, we have been very aggressive with our pruning strategy. As soon as summer berry harvest ends, we begin pruning out the old canes. I feel that plant health is the most important consideration, we try to remove all diseased canes. We select the best 6-8 canes per foot of row and attach them to the trellis with clips. We are experimenting with some varieties leaving only 4 canes per foot of row. I would recommend trying several different cane densities to see which is best for you.

Once the raspberry plants have seen a few killing frosts, we begin our fall pruning. The summer red raspberries are topped to 6 inches above the trellis wire. Our top wire is 52-60 inches above the soil for all brambles, the standard used to be 36-40 inches. On black berries and black raspberries, we cut the laterals back to 12 inches. The result has been virtual elimination of winter damage, with temperatures as low as – 15 degrees. Improving plant health and growth contributed to increased yields and profits.