

Blackberry Mite & Red Berry Disease

Red berry disease in blackberries and hybrid berries is caused by the blackberry mite. The condition is most common on wild blackberries, but is starting to become more widespread in cultivated bushes.



DAMAGE:

Affected fruits do not ripen fully. Some drupelets, (usually those at the base of the fruit) remain red, or greenish red and hard. The damage increases as the picking season progresses, with late fruit being the most seriously affected.

The mite which causes the damage is tiny (less than 0.2mm long) and overwinters beneath bud scales and within old fruit that is left on the cane. It re-emerges in early spring to breed on the plant's new growth. The mites enter the flowers at blossom time and feed on the developing drupelets. An enzyme is injected during the feeding process and it is this that prevents the affected drupelets from ripening.

Numbers of the mite increase rapidly as temperatures rise and there will be a number of generations throughout the summer. Few mites however survive to over-winter.

CONTROL:

There is no satisfactory method of chemical control against this pest and where the damage to the fruit is severe the only remedy is to cut out all of the canes, both old and new and burn them. Once you have interrupted the life-cycle of the pest in this way the problem should be resolved, and it should not be necessary to resort to burning again unless re-infestation occurs.

As a preventative measure and if there is sufficient space, it is worth considering planting two bushes and cropping them in alternate years so that when one bush is cropping in one year the other is in its 'off' year. This can be achieved by simply pruning all the canes down to ground level in the autumn of the 'on' year and burning them. This will interrupt the life cycle of the mite so that in the 'on' year there are no mites to cause damage to the fruit.