



Ken Muir Guide to Growing Blackberries & Blackberry Hybrids

A selection of these fruits can provide fresh berries from early July until the first severe frosts occur in the autumn. They provide a variety of flavours ranging from that of the true blackberry to those arising from crosses between raspberry with blackberry and other rubus species. All these fruits will freeze well and make excellent jam. With good management and provided they remain free of virus infection, they will yield heavy crops for fifteen to twenty years.

PLANTING DISTANCES

As planting distances between plants vary according to the variety, please refer to the information given in our brochure or on our website for further details. [Click here](#) to view our blackberry/blackberry hybrid range.

If blackberries/blackberry hybrids are planted in one row, the row should be 1.8-2.1m (6-7ft) away from other fruits.

MANURING

With the exception of Fantasia, these fruits should be manured generously with a fertilizer containing nitrogen in order to encourage growth of the long lengths of cane required to cover the supporting wires. With Fantasia, the amount of nitrogen applied should be governed by the vigour of the canes. It may be advisable not to apply any at all in some years.

During March, or immediately following planting, whichever is the later, broadcast in a circle 45cm (18in) diameter round each plant:

*35g (1¼oz) Nitro-Chalk (calcium ammonium nitrate)
and 10g (¼oz) sulphate of potash.*

Similarly, at the end of May and June broadcast:

20g (¾oz) Nitro-Chalk (calcium ammonium nitrate).

In succeeding years each March, broadcast over a distance 90cm (3ft) on both sides of the rows or in a circle 90cm (3ft) around individual bushes:

*20g/m² (¾oz/yd²) Nitro-Chalk (calcium ammonium nitrate)
and 10g/m² (¼oz/yd²) sulphate of potash.*

Alternatively, a compound fertilizer may be used after planting and annually thereafter, following the manufacturer's recommendations.

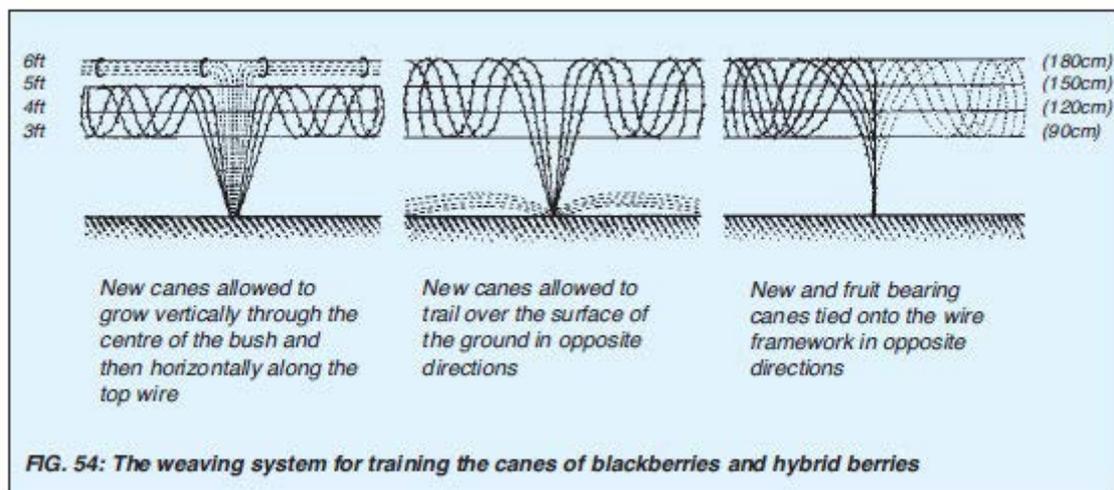
POST & WIRE SUPPORTS

With the exception of the variety 'Reuben' these cane fruits are best grown on wires attached by vine eyes to a wall or fence or on a free standing framework of posts and wires. The wires should be 3.5mm (10 gauge). The end posts should be 10 x 10cm (4 x 4in) and 2.5m (8¹/₄ft) in length, driven 75cm (30in) into the ground. Intermediate posts measuring 5 x 5cm (2 x 2in) should be positioned 3.9m (13ft) apart in the row. Four wires should be positioned at heights of 90, 120, 150 and 180cm (3, 4, 5 and 6ft respectively) loosely stapled to the intermediate posts and tightened around the end posts. An alternative method of supporting weaker growing varieties, such as Waldo or Loch Ness, is to tie their canes to a single, free standing stake 180 cm (6ft) out of the ground. The string used to loosely support the canes to the stake can be prevented from slipping down the stake by threading it through staples at 30cm (12in) intervals attached to the post.

METHOD FOR TRAINING THE CANES (Except the Variety 'Reuben')

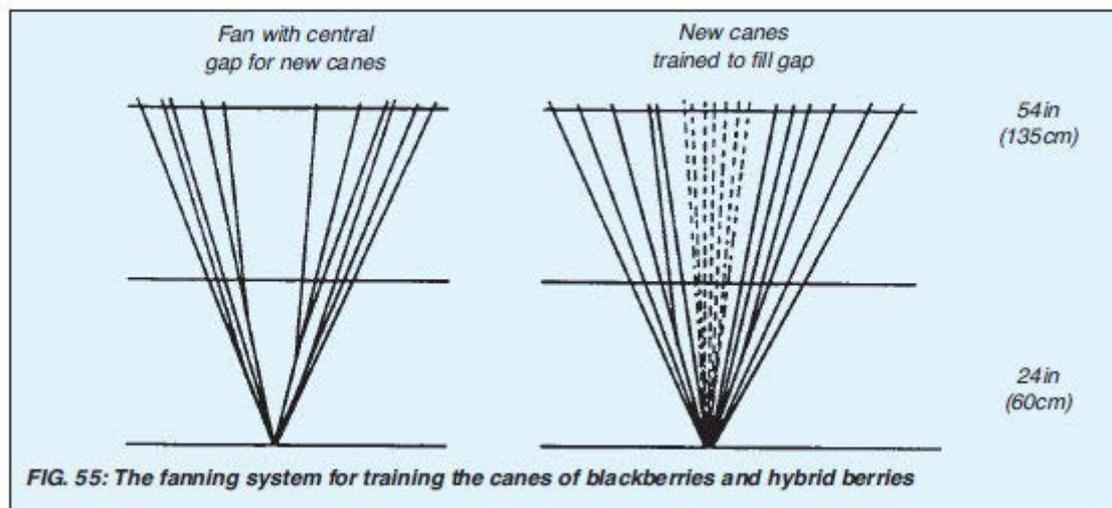
There are several ways that the new canes can be trained; the simplest is to divide them into two lots and train them in opposite directions on the ground below the fruiting canes. They are kept in position by means of wooden pegs or short lengths of wire pushed into the ground. At the end of the winter after the spent fruiting cane has been removed, the new cane should be picked up off the ground, disentangled and trained in their fruiting positions, using all the supporting wires.

There are several methods for training the new canes into their fruiting positions and the best one is to space full lengths of the canes out evenly across the wires. This method makes picking easy and gives the highest yield of fruit. The canes are tied onto the wires in a weaving pattern with thin string or 4in (10cm) twist ties (see fig. 54).



Some varieties, for example 'Loch Ness' produce semi-erect canes in the first year but become more erect as the stools become established in later years. They are too brittle to be tied on to the wires in a weaving pattern. They should be trained in a similar way to raspberries on two wires with supporting posts. To maximise yield,

each new cane should have its growing point pinched out when it is 60cm (2ft) tall at the end of May. Each cane will then produce two to three secondary branches which will grow to a height of approximately 1.8m (6ft). When fruit picking is over, the old canes should be cut out at soil level and the new ones spread out in a fan shape and tied to the top and bottom wires. A space of 45cm (18in) in the centre of the stool should be left free from canes. In the following summer the new canes should then be trained and loosely tied into this space so as to separate the new canes from the fruiting canes and make fruiting easier (see fig. 55).



PRUNING (See Below With Respect To The Variety 'Reuben')

The existing cane growth on bare root plants should be pruned back to 30cm (12in) before planting; in June when the new shoots are growing strongly, the old canes should be cut down to soil level to prevent flowering and fruit production. In subsequent years), pruning of the spent fruiting canes may be carried out at any convenient time after picking stops and before growth starts in early spring.

TRAINING & PRUNING THE PRIMOCANE BLACKBERRY 'REUBEN'

'Reuben' is currently the only primocane blackberry available and unlike other blackberries, which fruit on the wood produced in the previous season, 'Reuben' crops on the current years growth, in the same way as an autumn fruiting raspberry. Because of its upright habit it requires very little in the way of support and pruning simply consists of cutting down all the canes to ground level each February.

CANE NUMBERS & THINNING

Some varieties produce large numbers of canes from the base of the plant, whilst other varieties produce few canes initially but secondary growth later on. To obtain high yields, as many canes as possible up to twenty four are required for each bush. In addition to these, a small number should be retained to allow for breakages. New canes in excess of these numbers should be removed in May and June whilst they are still short.

THE BIENNIAL CROPPING SYSTEM

If there is sufficient space, it is worth considering planting two bushes and cropping them in alternate years. The advantages of biennial cropping are that the bushes are much easier to manage and to tie in, the fruit is easier to pick and pests and diseases can be controlled more effectively. The variety 'Fantasia' is so heavy cropping that it may not be necessary to plant two bushes, since the fruit harvested in its cropping year may be sufficient to stock the freezer for the family's consumption during its 'off' year.

Biennial cropping is achieved by cutting the fruiting canes out at ground level, once their crop has all been harvested (which is done in any case whether the intention is to crop the bush annually or biennially). At the same time, the young canes (next year's fruiting wood) produced during the summer months are cut out at ground level, though it is better to start cutting out these young canes from the time they emerge from the base of the bush in the spring and continuing to do so as they appear throughout the summer, rather than delaying the task until the fruit has all been picked. The bush will then be overwintering for the first time without any cane growth whatsoever. A new set of canes will appear in the spring from the base of the bush; these canes are tied in onto the supporting wires at intervals throughout the summer until the supporting structure or fence is completely covered. At this stage any further growth is pruned away; if an excessive number of canes are tied in it becomes counter-productive.

With the biennial cropping system, tying in is done during the summer months, usually once a fortnight and is completed by September. When blackberries are allowed to fruit every year, the tying in of the young canes is normally done during the autumn or winter months and involves separating the young canes from the fruiting canes as well as disentangling the young canes from one another.

With biennial cropping, there are no new canes growing up in front of the fruiting canes, making it difficult to pick the fruit. Furthermore, by pruning all the canes down to ground level in the autumn after harvest and burning them, the life cycle of pests and diseases will be interrupted.