

What is the best way to prune blackberries?

The pruning of blackberries is a good subject to cover, as many commercial growers in Pajaro Valley are engaged in this activity right now.

Pruning is a very important step in the management of blackberries, since it removes old, unusable cane and keeps the hedgerow disease free and vigorous. However, there are few key points to bear in mind when pruning blackberries.

The first key is that blackberries bear on the second year canes, known by caneberry growers as the floricanes. These are the canes, once having flowered and fruited, that need to be removed in the pruning, and one should cut them down in most cases down to the ground. By doing so, one is removing canes which are dead and will no longer produce while at the same time removing a potential source of disease and insects. Most often it is best to do this a little bit later in the fall or in the winter to allow the remaining energy reserves to descend from the floricanes back into the crown.

Secondly, the first year vegetative canes, also known as the primocanes, are the canes one wants to leave when pruning since they will be producing flowers and fruit in the following year. In the first vegetative, non-bearing year, the primocanes should be trained to the trellising system and pruned back (or tipped) to 4 to 5 feet long and the branches pruned back to a length of 2 to 3 feet. When pruning these canes back, it is suggested to make pruning cuts not flat across the front of the cut, but rather at an angle so as to allow water to flow off of them more easily.

Finally, a good idea to be able to distinguish floricanes from primocanes in the dormant season is to paint the bottoms of the primocanes with white latex paint in the winter of the first year. This will allow one, following the harvest of fruit of those same canes in the second year, to distinguish the dead floricanes from the still living but defoliated primocanes by merit of the white paint at their base.

The above has been an article about pruning blackberries. For any questions about strawberries or caneberries, please contact Mark Bolda at UC Cooperative Extension in Watsonville, 763-8040 or [mpbolda@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mpbolda@ucdavis.edu).