

Spring is right around the corner, so what sort of preparation work should I be doing on my raspberries and blackberries?

With the warm temperatures of late, we are reminded that spring truly is right around the corner and there might be some things that we should be doing to get our blackberries and raspberries ready for the upcoming season.

Pruning and Trellising: If growers and gardeners haven't done so, it is high time to get the pruning done. Pruning is done for two reasons; the first to remove old, diseased cane (bearing in mind that cane which has borne fruit in the last season will no longer bear and should be removed) and secondly to create a stand or hedgerow of canes which facilitates their management. Remember to clip the canes at an angle when pruning so precipitation doesn't pool on top on the cane and provide a platform for diseases.

Trellising is also important to have finished now. Some blackberry cultivars may seem to be more self-supporting than a trailing variety like Ollalieberry, but even so all blackberry types are easier to manage and benefit from trellising. For raspberries, growers should look to maintain an ideal hedgerow width of 12 inches and opening in a "V" shape which ultimately will be about 3 feet wide at shoulder height.

Disease and Arthropod Control: In past years it was standard to apply lime sulfur beginning in the fall and through the winter to control various diseases (most often stem and cane rust on Ollalieberry) and arthropods such as redberry mite, but the necessity of these fall/winter lime sulfur applications for newer raspberry and blackberry varieties is something I question based on recent research I have done. Blackberry growers should rather concentrate their pest management efforts on Golden Pest spray oil applications beginning with the first green fruit in the spring for redberry mites, and rust applications for raspberries much later in the season when these diseases becomes prevalent.

Field Management: At this time of year, when possible it does pay to cultivate the area between the hedgerows to keep weeds down and incorporate pruned canes and other plant trash into the soil. Since the caneberry roots generally don't grow near the surface in this area, normal tillage with a disk will not cause much harm to them.

The above has been a brief guide to managing blackberries and raspberries in the later winter on the Central Coast of California. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.