



Primocane raspberries on a farm near Torrington, Wyoming. Photo by Jeff Edwards.

Revive your raspberry patch

How do I take care of my raspberry patch? Believe it or not, this is a frequently asked question in Wyoming. Raspberries are native and relatively easy to grow in our state, which means that new homeowners often acquire a raspberry patch along with their property. For those looking to revive a legacy patch, here are some pointers.

Raspberry basics

All raspberry varieties produce new stems, also known as canes, each year. Raspberries are classified

by production type as either **floricane** or **primocane**.

Raspberry canes growing and branching from old wood are considered floricanes. Non-branching new growth canes from the crown of the plant are called primocanes.

Floricanes

Floricane raspberries are considered summer, or short-season, raspberries. Many varieties are available but in general, floricane plants are usually less than 4 feet tall, have an erect growth habit,

and are usually very spiny. They start producing fruit about mid-July; fruiting is usually finished by the end of August. Their berries are typically about the size of a thumbnail. Floricane raspberries are most productive at elevations above 5,000 feet.

Floricane varieties yield the most fruit when they are allowed to produce fruit on second-year wood. When you plant floricane raspberries, it is highly likely that you will not get very much, if any, fruit the first year as the plants typically send up new single (non-branching)

canes. If you leave those single canes to overwinter and grow the following spring, they will develop branches, flower on the terminals of the branches, and produce fruit the second year.

If you want to maintain a productive raspberry patch, those branched canes need to be trimmed out during the spring of the third year. Thus, floricanes raspberries need to be *selectively* pruned every single year.

Primocanes

Primocane raspberries are considered fall, or long-season, raspberries and are most productive on first-year canes. As with floricanes raspberries, many varieties are available. Primocanes are typically more than 4 feet tall, benefit from a trellising system, and do not appear as spiny as floricanes varieties. They start producing ripe fruit about the last week of August; fruiting is usually finished by the first fall freeze. Berries can be quite large, often the size of your thumb tip to the first joint. These berries are most productive at elevations below 5,000 feet.

Primocane varieties yield the most fruit on first-year wood, which means that when you plant primocanes, it is highly likely that you will get fruit the first year. This can be confusing because primocane varieties will also produce fruit on second-year wood—but if left to branch, the yield will be less than what can be expected when maintaining only first-year canes.

If you want to maintain a healthy and productive primocane berry

patch, the plants must be non-selectively mowed to the ground every spring (February or March). The literature suggests this can be done in the fall as well, but letting the canes overwinter allows all the nutrients in the stem to return to the root mass. Canes left over the winter also trap snow, allowing your patch to collect added moisture.

Patch renovation

Since floricanes and primocanes produce fruit differently, it is a good idea to start by determining which type you are attempting to grow. Below are some tips on how to identify the type of raspberries in your patch and manage them for optimal fruit production.

In the spring, mow off *all* the canes to approximately 3 inches from the ground. It may sound like a radical idea, but it works, and they will recover. You may need to clip the canes with pruners, then mow the patch with a lawn mower or sickle bar mower. Collect the canes from the patch and either mulch or burn.

Next, take a soil sample from your patch and submit it to Colorado State University's soil-testing lab, making sure to indicate that you are growing raspberries. Contact a UW Extension office for instructions on how to do this and assistance with understanding what the analysis means. For optimal fruit production, soil analysis is recommended every third year.

Fertilization is required every year. Raspberries are heavy feeders and require regular intervals of fertilizer prior to fruit set. Using the soil analysis and fertilizer



Fall-bearing raspberries in Platte County, Wyoming. Photo by LeRoy Jons.



Primocane raspberries grown on a farm near Torrington. Photo by Jeff Edwards.

recommendations, split the total recommended fertilizer amount into thirds and apply one-third on April 1, one-third on May 1, and one-third on June 1. If the leaves begin to turn yellow during this growth period, it is a good indicator they need iron (not more nitrogen). Apply a chelated iron product using the label instructions.

Raspberries require 1.5 inches of water per week prior to fruit set and at least 2 inches of water each week during fruit set.

As the plants recover from the mowing process, you will notice the two types of canes developing: 1) the floricanes, which branch from the mowed canes (second-year wood, which may also branch), and 2) the primocanes, the new single-stem canes emerging from the soil.

As they continue to develop over the course of the spring and summer, watch and keep track of these two types of canes. If most of the fruit is early and from the second-year wood (branching terminals), they are likely floricanes varieties. If most of the fruit appears in late summer and fall and is primarily from the new canes, they are likely a primocane variety.

Annual patch management

To be most productive, **floricane** varieties need to be selectively pruned annually, removing the canes that branched and produced fruit the previous year (removing the second-year canes in the third year). If your patch is quite large, it may be easiest to use a lawn mower

and mow strips through the patch annually.

Each subsequent year, move the mow strip adjacent to the mowed strip of the previous year. This will allow you to keep track of the first-year (non-producing) wood and more easily manage the second-year wood after it has been most productive. You may also need to mow strips through the patch that you maintain as walkways so you can harvest berries without damaging canes.

Primocane varieties are much easier to manage. Because of this, most commercial varieties (raspberries you find in the grocery store) are primocane varieties. Each spring, mow the entire patch to about 3 inches from the ground, then remove and mulch or burn the canes. Regardless of what variety you have, water and fertilize as discussed previously.

If you recently purchased a home and inherited a legacy berry patch, it might be easiest to contact the previous owner and ask them what variety of raspberry you've acquired. With a little research, you should be able to determine if they are floricanes or primocane varieties.

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