

## **Fall and Winter to-do List for Blackberry**

By Aaron Cato, Extension Specialist, Horticulture IPM

After blackberries are harvested there are still many pests that need to be monitored and controlled throughout the fall and winter months to ensure that yields are maximized in the following year. First, utilize cultural control tactics to reduce pest numbers across insects, diseases, and weeds. Next, use the following recommendations for management of insects, diseases, and weeds during the fall-winter months, and consult the [\*Southeast Regional Caneberry Integrated Management Guide\*](#) for specific recommendations.

### **Cultural Control Tactics**

1. Remove all harvested floricanes (second-year canes) and burn them outside of the planting. This will lower disease inoculum within plantings significantly.
2. Maximize efforts in weed management to help increase airflow between rows of blackberries. It's important to get rows cleaned up prior to the dormant season to get ahead for next year and maximize penetration of fungicide applications. Growers should be shooting for 3 ft of bare ground adjacent to plants and mowed row middles.
3. Clean up field edges and hedgerows to maximize airflow into plantings and remove all nearby wild blackberries where possible.
4. Prune canopies to maximize airflow and plant production. It is best to wait until cold days when plants are dormant to fully prune plants. This helps to lower the amount of injury you can cause to plants and helps to prevent disease from getting in canes.
5. Remove all damaged, diseased, or galled canes. Prioritize keeping healthy canes when pruning, as damaged will have reduced yield and will increase risk of damage from insects and disease.

### **Insect Management**

Raspberry crown borer can be effectively managed in the fall using a soil drench of Brigade or Altacor in a 50-to-100-gal solution. This application should be applied late October-early November. This application will control newly-hatched larvae as they move down to the base of plants to bore in to the crown of the plant. Second, all first-year canes that have galls from red-necked cane borer (Picture 1) should be pruned out during winter pruning. If greater than 5% of canes are galled, weekly foliar applications may be warranted during May-June to suppress the population.



Picture 1 – Cane infested with red-necked cane borer. Canes will have galls generally 18 inches from the base of crowns, as seen on one cane in this picture. These canes will not be very productive and should be removed.

### **Disease Management**

Maximizing cultural control tactics will be key in preventing serious disease issues. Early-Fall disease risk can be lowered by immediately removing floricanes after harvest to reduce disease inoculum. This should be combined with heavy winter pruning to remove all diseased canes, such as those with anthracnose lesions that have begun to crack (Picture 2). All pruned canes should be removed from the planting and burned. Any additional measures that can be done to increase airflow and decrease the amount of inoculum present should be prioritized during the Fall and Winter months before susceptible plant material emerges in the Spring.

In addition to these cultural practices, regular fungicide applications should continue after harvest to lower the amount of inoculum present. Captan every 10-14 days (depending on rainfall) should be used as a baseline protectant program post-harvest until temperatures drop. An addition of Quilt Xcel with captan should be considered to enhance prevention of Anthracnose issues and cleanup both leaf spot diseases and cane and leaf rust when they are present. After dormancy is reached, fungicides will not be necessary until the delayed-dormant application of Lime-Sulfur or Sulforix once the green tip growth stage is reached. This fungicide is very important for cleaning up Anthracnose and growers should source product for this application now. The window for spraying is very small and often suppliers need to order these fungicides. If diseases from nematodes are suspected, samples should be taken in the fall with county agents to determine the scale of the potential problem.



Picture 2 – Blackberry cane with excessive anthracnose lesions. Lesions begin as white/purplish scars as seen on the edge of this cane but can join and completely split the cane open as seen in the center of this cane. This will lead to lowered yield and fruit quality on this cane.

### **Weed Management**

Starting off the new year with a host of weeds will only compound problems for next year, and early-fall is a good time to control many perennial weeds. Paraquat can be used to burn down weeds around the base of canes after berries are harvested, but should only be used in plantings established for 1 or more years. The base of young/green canes can be injured by paraquat sprayed around the base of plants, but established plants in the fall months should be fine.

Tillage can be used to maintain weed-free strips when plants are dormant, generally around the same time as winter pruning. Tillage should be limited to a depth of 2-3 inches to prevent injury to the root systems of established blackberries. Pre-emergent herbicides should be used after any tillage event to prevent germination in freshly tilled soil, especially when soil temperatures are still conducive for weed emergence.

As always, give me a call if you have any questions. Aaron Cato – 479-249-7352



Picture 3 – Blackberry Planting in the fall with successful weed control. Note how a weed free strip is being maintained beyond the weed fabric to obtain at least 3ft without weeds.