

2024 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 managed throughout the fall and winter months to ensure that yields can be maximized in the following year. First, utilize cultural control tactics to reduce insects, pathogens, and weeds. In my experience, the growers that emphasize cultural control on their operations are those that achieve the highest levels of suppression of insect pests and disease. Next, use the recommendations below for management of raspberry crown borer, raspberry cane borer, and several diseases during the fall-winter months, and consult the [Southeast Regional Caneberry Integrated Management Guide](#) for specific recommendations. Also see the recently-updated [Southeast Regional Caneberry Production Guide](#) for best management practices to maximize pest suppression.

Cultural Control Tactics

1. Remove all harvested floricanes (second-year canes) ASAP after harvest 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 dormancy to maximize airflow in the fall and help with penetration of fungicide applications. Growers should be shooting for 3 ft of bare ground adjacent to plants and mowed row middles (Picture 1).
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 pathogens from infecting canes.
5. Remove all damaged, diseased, or galled canes. Prioritize keeping healthy canes when pruning, as damaged canes will have reduced yield and possibly harbor insects such as raspberry cane borer or many pathogens.



Picture 1 – Blackberry planting in the fall with acceptable weed management. Note how a weed free strip is being maintained beyond the weed fabric to obtain at least 3ft from the center of plants without weeds.

Insect Management

We normally observe damage from raspberry crown borer in the spring (Picture 2), but effective control can be achieved 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 and should contact the bottom 6 inches of cane and the soil around the crown. This application will control newly hatched larvae as they move down to the base of plants where they will overwinter in the cambium just below or above the soil. You can likely achieve control with an application in the very early spring prior to larvae boring into the crown, but this timing will vary year-to-year based on accumulated degree days in the new year, which is a risky business.



Picture 2. Primocanes with a “shepherd’s hook” appearance after raspberry crown borers have fed on the crown at the base of these canes. These primocanes will die back and the damaged crowns will be exposed to infection by pathogens.

All first-year canes (primocanes) that have galls from rednecked cane borer (Picture 3) should be removed during winter pruning. If greater than 5% of canes are galled, weekly foliar applications may be warranted during May-June to suppress adults. A soil drench of imidacloprid in late March can also be considered to target adults as they exit canes. Blackberry plants generally produce many more canes than the 4-6 canes per plant that are optimal for good fruit size and quality, so winter pruning generally necessitates removal of several canes. This is the main reason we use a threshold of 5% for galled canes, as it is unlikely you will incur economic damage from choosing those canes to be removed. This may not be true for all cultivars as some, such as ‘Caddo’, don’t produce nearly as many canes.



Picture 3 – Cane infested with red-necked cane borer. Canes generally will have galls within 18-24 inches from the base of crowns, as seen on one cane in this picture. These canes will not be productive and should be removed to reduce the rednecked cane borer population.

Disease Management

Maximizing cultural control tactics is necessary to prevent serious disease issues. Early-fall disease risk can be lowered by immediately removing fruiting canes (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 4). Many growers begin selective pruning or removal of damaged or stunted canes after harvest before picking labor leaves. This is a good time to get rid of anything showcasing excess disease, however, this should be avoided around rainfall events and an effective fungicide, such as Pristine, should be immediately applied after cuts are made to decrease the risk of cane blight and other cane diseases infecting pruning wounds. All pruned canes should be removed from the planting and burned ASAP. Any additional measures that can be taken 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 clean up 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.

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



Picture 4 – 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, and spores can move to leaves and eventually fruit which will further lower quality.