

BerryCare: Building a Blackberry Community

Dawn Brewer, PhD, RD and Annie Koempel, MA, RD, Dietetics and Human Nutrition, and Amy Kostelic, PhD, Family Sciences

You've likely heard how blackberries are good for your health. Growing blackberry bushes as a garden project can even be rewarding for your mental health if you do it as a group. Your local Cooperative Extension Office or non-profit organization may have the perfect place and people for planting the bushes where berries can be shared with an identified community. With the right group, a little sunshine and good drainage, the right variety, and proper blackberry plant care, a group can work towards a successful harvest. (For more information on how to plant blackberry bushes, please review the publications *Growing Blackberries and Raspberries in Kentucky* [HO-15] from UK CES and *Blackberries* [CCD-CP-4] from the UK Center for Crop Diversification).

There are a lot of factors to consider when beginning a blackberry gardening project. A committee can help decide where should the garden be located? Would a certain variety of blackberry do better than another? When is the proper time to harvest? How should the berries be stored?



What is the best way to incorporate these berries into the diet once harvested? These issues are all important, and oftentimes it is easiest to make decisions when a group of informed and interested individuals come together to make these decisions at the beginning of a project.

Developing a committee early in the process is key to the success of growing blackberry bushes or any type of community garden.

Ideally, committee members are motivated volunteers who are willing to give a little more of

their time to the project to ensure its success for the entire community. A committee could include three to eight dedicated individuals.

Committees can work in a variety of ways; some people might want to take charge of one aspect of a project while others might prefer moving between activities and roles. However your committee chooses to operate, Table 1 lists a few tasks crucial to maintaining blackberry bushes.

Community partners can also play an important role in your blackberry gardening project. Reach out to local schools, clubs, senior centers,

fitness centers, community centers, and other organizations that might be interested in partnering with you. Sharing the responsibility to care for the plants can be helpful and fun. This can also help to build neighborhood ties and facilitate the development of relationships in your area. Strong communities are often built on shared stories, exchanges of information, expressions of creativity, and projects that prepare the community for the future. Members of strong communities tend to inspire others to make their physical and social environment a better place and to support each other more. Having a strong sense of community or belonging also leads to stronger families and a healthier community.

Throughout the course of the BerryCare lesson series, you will learn a lot of information to help you answer questions specific to blackberry plants and gardening. A lot of the skills you will learn can also be used to grow other plants, such as raspberries and blueberries. Having a strong sense of community—and a core group of dedicated committee members—will assure the continued growth of your plants and your community.

Table 1. Tasks to maintain blackberry bushes.
Ordering blackberry plants and finding a location to store them until the plant date
Preparing the soil
Watering
Weeding
Fertilizing
Pest management
Pruning
Harvesting berries
Sharing and storing berries





Acknowledgement

This publication is made possible in part by the 2016 UK HES Extension Activity Award and grant number P42 ES007380 from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of NIEHS, NIH.

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