

Pruning Bearing Rabbiteye Blueberry Plants

As plants reach bearing age, more attention may be needed to limit plant height. As rabbiteye blueberry plants reach 5 or more years old, selective hand pruning for cane renewal becomes one of the primary objectives. Annual removal of 20 to 25 percent of the oldest canes prior to initiation of spring growth will stimulate the production of new canes and should result in plants with canes of different ages and a desirable balance of vigor and fruit production.

Moderate summer pruning may be combined with selective cane removal on early ripening rabbiteyes. Vigorous shoots that will grow well beyond the desired canopy height can be identified and cut back to a desirable height. Other vigorous canes developing from the ground can be topped to stimulate branching and flower bud formation.

Light topping done after harvest (July) can help maintain canopy height for hand harvesting. Mechanical topping does not remove dead wood from the bush interior nor does it allow for rejuvenation of the bush.

Alternate-year summer pruning may give higher yields than annual pruning, because the shoots that result from summer pruning tend to be unbranched the first year but will branch the second year.

Rejuvenation of Rabbiteye Plants

Rejuvenation, or renewal, pruning of rabbiteye blueberry plants can be accomplished by one of several methods.

Bushes can be hedged at 1 to 2 feet during the winter or summer, but this will significantly reduce yields for one or two years following pruning and may cause excessively vigorous regrowth.

It is best to selectively remove several of the tallest canes each dormant season for several years. This will help to control the vigor of the newly developing canes and keep the annual yields somewhat uniform while the plant is reduced in size.

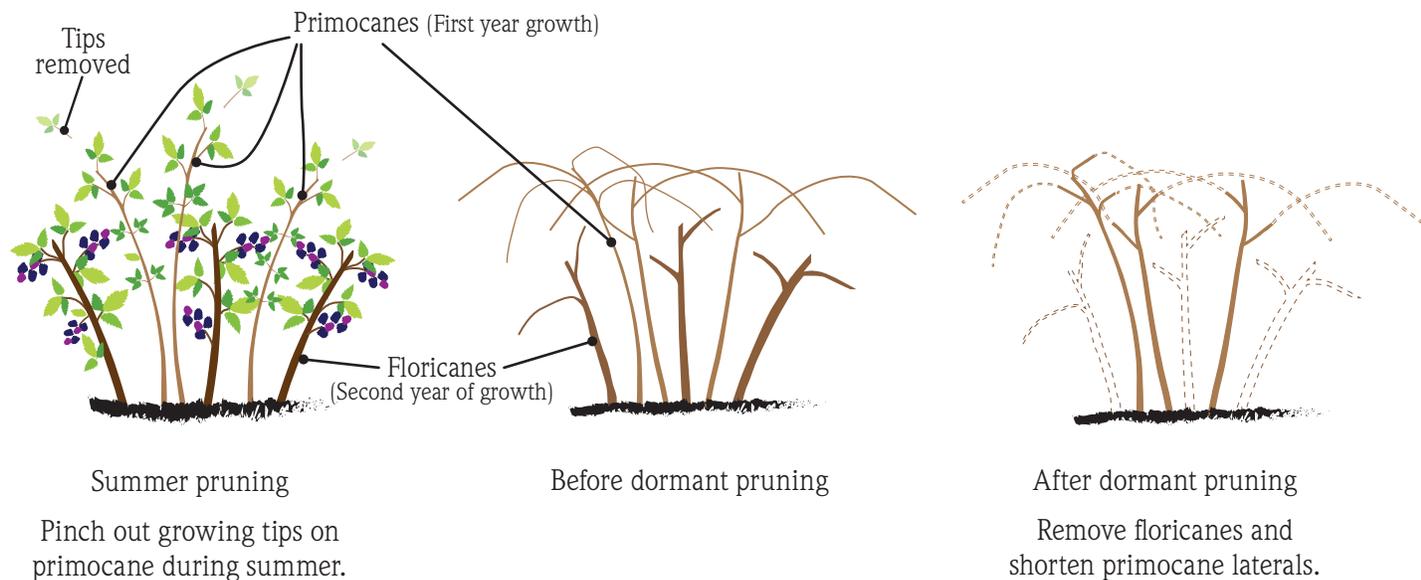
Blackberries

Pruning and Training

The first step in pruning blackberries is to understand their growth cycle. Blackberries have crowns that produce biennial shoots (live for two years and then die).

During the first year of growth, the shoots are called primocanes. These primocanes develop flower buds the first year of growth. In the second year, the shoots are called floricanes. These floricanes produce flowers that mature into fruit. After fruiting, these floricanes die and should be removed.

Support trailing and semitrailing varieties by a trellis or similar structure. A two-wire system, with wires at 3- and 5-foot heights, works well. As the shoots emerge in the spring, tie them to the wires in a fan-shaped pattern. Do not top the canes during the growing season. Prune out and discard the old floricanes during the dormant season. It will be obvious which canes are the dead floricanes.



Blackberries