

## **Growing and Pruning Guide for Primocane-Fruiting Black Raspberries**

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These instructions are for use with test plantings of primocane-fruiting black-raspberry plants, such as the present selection 'PT-2A4'.

These instructions are based on my experience with primocane-fruiting black raspberry plants, both this selection and others, as grown in my area, which is an erratic USDA zone 5. Conditions in other climates and zones might cause the plants to act somewhat differently.

### **Young Plants**

Planting and initial care should be the same as for any standard black raspberry cultivar of the form received.

In the year of planting, primocane flowers might not form or might form very late in the season. Flowering will depend on how well the plants become established and initiate new primocanes after planting. The primocanes on young plants might also have more of a tendency to tip root than would primocanes on more mature plants.

If the new primocanes reach three feet high before the end of June, consider tip pruning as described later.

The first-year primocane crop, if any, will be of limited use for evaluating productivity and fruiting season. A more representative primocane crop is expected in the second growing season.

### **Retaining versus Eliminating Floricanes**

Experience on past primocane-fruiting black raspberry selections indicates that eliminating floricanes in late winter or early spring, before buds break dormancy, can drive the primocane growth earlier in the season and thus possibly allow earlier primocane fruit ripening. Also, in the absence of competition from floricanes, the primocanes have more of a tendency to branch spontaneously instead of requiring tip pruning to force branching. On the other hand, my impression is that the plant is stronger if the floricanes are retained. Experimentation is warranted. However, it is quite clear that removing floricanes after bud break will significantly weaken the plant.

### **Summer Tip Pruning**

Tip pruning of the primocanes is used to (1) force branching of each primocane, thus creating more flowering tips than just the single primocane tip and therefore producing more berries than would be produced on an unpruned primocane, and (2) keep the flowering tips in more of an upright posture. I think keeping the tips more upright will reduce the tendency of the primocanes to arch over and downward trying to tip root instead of forming flowers.

Tip pruning will delay the flowering and ripening of the primocane crop compared to an unpruned primocane. My experience with an older selection is that the berries start to ripen on a particular primocane about 70 to 75 days following tip pruning; ripening continues for 3 to 4 weeks as long as there is no frost. (The ripening berries are frost tender.) Later tip pruning will lead to later ripening berries if that is your interest. Different primocanes on the same plant can be ripening berries on different schedules, depending on whether and when tip pruning was done.

My own tip pruning is done when primocanes are about three feet high in the latter part of June and first week of July, planning for ripening to start in late August to early September. I remove about 6 to 12 inches of the primocane tip, pruning just above a node. Pruning much after the first week in July may push my ripening too late in the season; plants could be caught by frosts before all the berries have ripened

There is also a cane position or time when an upper node on the primocane makes some kind of hormonal changeover, after which the node will form a flower cluster instead of a new branch. If tip pruning is done after this changeover, then tip pruning will reduce the number of berries instead of increasing the number of berries, since a complete flowering primocane tip is no longer available. I do not know what causes this changeover or when it occurs, but I have observed it on several occasions when a primocane tip is accidentally damaged after I've stopped my planned tip pruning.

If early primocane-fruit ripening is your overriding goal, then avoid tip pruning. Growing without tip pruning might be worth a try for growers in short-season areas such as zones 3 and 4.

### **Winter/Spring Floricane Pruning**

If floricanes are to be retained for a floricane crop, then pruning in early spring is useful to remove last year's spent floricanes and to remove the upper portions of canes that had fruited in the autumn. In early spring, it will be fairly obvious what portion of the upper canes have died back. Additionally, consider removing any weak canes. Follow instructions for standard black raspberry cultivars as regards heading back floricane branches and limiting (or not) the number of vigorous floricanes retained.