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GARDEN NOTES

BERRY TASTY FRUIT

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Raspberries are one of the most common fruits grown in backyards, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Though they prefer warm days, cooler nights, and a little more moisture than we get along the Wasatch front, they do quite well in northern Utah.

Some soils in our area can cause problems for raspberry growers, he says. These plants like a well-drained, high organic soil, and many Utah soils are heavy clay with low drainage. Raspberries can survive under these conditions, it just takes more care and diligence. To improve the soil, work as much organic matter as possible into the bed before planting. If the water table is high in that area, consider planting them in raised beds to allow proper drainage.

"Good watering habits are critical when it comes to the health of raspberry plants," Goodspeed adds. "Most people over-water, which causes root rot, iron chlorosis and other problems. My raspberries are growing in sandy soil, and I don't water them more than about once a week. A friend of mine is growing raspberries in a heavy clay soil. He waters them about once a month, and they seem to do just fine. Raspberries have deep roots, so water them deeply and infrequently."

Most berries do not require a lot of fertilizer, he says. A good shot of nitrogen fertilizer once early in the spring usually is enough to keep the plants healthy and producing. It's also a good idea to apply an organic mulch around the base at the same time you apply the fertilizer. This eventually breaks down and improves the soil.

Another benefit of a mulch is weed control. A thick organic mulch keeps down most of the weeds that will try to invade the patch. Some pre-emergent herbicides can also be used under the mulch to improve weed control. Ask your local nursery or garden center what they have available. Be sure that raspberries are listed on the label, then read and follow all directions.

Iron chlorosis is a disease that turns leaves yellow while the veins remain green, Goodspeed says. It can stunt growth and reduce berry production. Normally it is associated with over-watering and heavy soils. Reducing the frequency of watering and applying chelated iron products can help.

The most frustrating pest in raspberry patches can be cane borers, he says. As the name

implies, these mean-spirited pests bore into the cane of the raspberry. These boring insects cut the water supply to the top of the cane causing the top leaves to wilt, and the top to bend over so it looks like a shepherd's crook. When this occurs, most people assume that the plants need more water, which, once it is applied, actually causes more damage. The best control is to remove the affected part of the cane and discard it.

Another issue is the occasional problem with a few insects that eat the berries, he says. Not a lot can be done to discourage this kind of activity. Wash the berries well before eating them to make sure these pests don't become part of your berry meal. Fortunately, most of them are not heavy eaters.

White spots on the berries can be related to insects or sunburn, Goodspeed says. It usually does not affect the flavor of the berries, just the color.

For more information, contact your local USU County Extension office.

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