

WHEN TO PICK BLACKBERRIES

The exact time to harvest blackberries varies by cultivar, with thorny blackberries normally ripening earlier than thornless types. But there are some general guidelines to keep in mind when harvesting blackberries. Do not pick blackberries too early or berry size and flavor will be sacrificed. Two major characteristics determining maturity for harvest are fruit color and ease of separation. Blackberries usually develop a dull, black color with plump, juicy fruitlets as they ripen. The berries soften and produce the characteristic flavor. Full color often develops before the berries separate easily. Pick the berries by gently lifting with the thumb and fingers. The receptacle, or center part of the fruit, remains in the fruit when blackberries are harvested, unlike raspberries, which leave the receptacle on the bush. Take care not to crush the berries or expose them to the hot sun. When possible, avoid picking berries when they are wet. They'll probably need picking every second or third day. Cool the berries immediately after harvest to extend shelf life. Keep them refrigerated under high relative humidity and use within three to five days.

Brown Rot of Stone Fruits

The wet weather we have seen in some areas has caused a great deal of brown rot on stone fruits such as peaches and plums. Affected fruit develop a gray to brown, fuzzy growth on the fruit which may rot in as little as a day or two. It is best to start treating fruit about a month before harvest but spraying is still helpful even if we are within that one month period. Fruit that shows symptoms cannot be saved but should be destroyed to prevent further spread. Use Captan or myclobutanil (Immunox) for control. Many fruit tree sprays contain Captan but check the label to be certain. Apply Captan or Immunox every 7 to 14 days. Both products can be applied up to the day of harvest. Note that though Immunox is labeled for fruit but Immunox Plus is not.

Brown Patch on Fescue

We have been receiving numerous reports of brown patch showing up on tall fescue. This disease is favored by warm night temperatures and extended periods of leaf wetness. If you go outside in the morning and the lawn is covered with dew and the temperature is in the high 60s or higher, it means that conditions are getting right for brown patch. The fungus is primarily a leaf pathogen and does not attack the roots. During severe outbreaks, the fungus may invade the lower leaf sheaths and crown and kill plants. But in most cases, the turfgrass can recover from brown patch. This recovery may take two to three weeks, depending on weather. There is no way to eliminate brown patch from a lawn. It will persist indefinitely in the soil. Therefore, the disease is not carried from one lawn to another. In almost all cases, the limiting factor for brown patch development is the weather, not the amount of fungal inoculum. Although you can't eliminate the fungus, cultural practices – especially irrigation – can help control it. Don't water in the evening; instead, water early in the morning. This will help decrease the number of hours the leaf tissue remains wet and susceptible to infection. The frequency of irrigation is not as important as the time of day you do it. Don't overfertilize and certainly don't fertilize when brown patch is active. Also, don't get your seeding or overseeding rates too high. Fungicides can be effective in preventing brown patch, but the two most commonly used products (Heritage and ProStar) are expensive and not available in small quantities to the general public. Homeowners do have access to some effective products including triadimefon (Green Light Fung-Away), propiconazole (Bayer Fungus Control for Lawns, Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide II) and myclobutanil (Immunox). Of the three, triadimefon may be the fungicide of choice because it protects the turf longer (3 to 5 weeks rather than 2 weeks). But my suggestion is not to use fungicides unless you want to maintain a blemish-free yard and are willing to pay for it. In those cases, you would need to be on a preventative spray program, which is very expensive, rather than waiting for symptoms and applying as a curative. These products do not cure an infection already present but are only effective as a preventative. Applications should begin in mid-June and continue through August. Remember that more often than not the turf will recover from brown patch.

Harvesting Potatoes

Potatoes are ready to harvest when the vines are about half dead. Potatoes dug too early have tender skins and are easily bruised. Delaying digging will allow the soil to heat because it is no longer shaded by foliage. High soil temperatures can lead to sprouting potatoes. Allow potatoes to "set" by keeping them in a shady, dry location for a day or so. Move them to a cool, moist environment such as a cellar or cool basement for longer storage.

Pulling Onions

Onions are ready to harvest when about half the plants have tops that have fallen over. This is a sign that the onions are mature and need to be pulled out of the ground. Bulbs may sunburn without the foliage to protect them. The secret to onions keeping well is to allow the tops to dry completely before storage. Move onions to a shaded, well-ventilated area after harvest. After tops are completely dry, store in a cool, dry location. Large-necked onions take more time to dry than small-necked onions such as Bermuda types. Avoid storage in plastic bags because the lack of air circulation will shorten storage life. Use an open, mesh bag instead.

Sweet Corn Earworm

Corn earworm tends to be a problem every year on sweet corn in Kansas. The earworm moth lays eggs on developing silks at night. When the egg hatches, the larva crawls down the silk and into the ear. Feeding starts at the tip of the ear and works down. Though several earworms may hatch and attack a single ear, only one is usually present at harvest due to the cannibalistic nature of the insect. Control is challenging as silks continue to grow over a period of time. This means that even if silks are treated, new silk will appear that hasn't been protected. Applications every 2 to 3 days are needed for insecticides to be effective, especially in late June to early July when peak flight of these moths usually appear. There is a three-week period from silking to harvest, but there is only a two-week period from when the silks appear to when they begin to dry. Since moths prefer juicy silks and shun those that have started to dry, insecticides are only needed the first two weeks of silking. Homeowners can use cyfluthrin (Baythroid; Bayer Powerforce Multi-Insect Killer) or spinosad (SpinTor; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew; Conserve; Borer, Bagworm, Tent Caterpillar & Leafminer Spray). Spinosad is an organic product. Commercial growers have additional choices including zeta-cypermethrin (Mustang Max), bifenthrin+zeta-cypermethrin (Hero), spinetoram (Radiant) and flubendiamide (Belt). Though more time consuming, mineral or other light horticultural oils may also be used. The oil is placed inside the silk end of the ear with a medicine dropper (½ to ¾ of a dropper) after the silks brown. This will coat the earworms already present and likely suffocate them, though some damage to the tip of the ear will likely have occurred. Applying the oil before the silk has browned may interfere with pollination, leading to incompletely filled ears.