



# Autumn raspberries



We could all enjoy the sweet summer flavours of freshly picked raspberries late in the season, as **Bob Sherman** explains. Photography by Tim Sandall

**SIMPLICITY ITSELF**  
Autumn-fruiting raspberries could not be easier to prune: just cut all the canes down to the ground in late winter

the spirit of summer, but raspberries can be picked from late May until November, if the weather holds and you have both summer- and autumn-fruiting cultivars. Both types are just as sweet but it is the late-cropping extenders of the season that have been under assessment since 2005 by RHS trials staff. A report is due later this year with recommendations for Award of Garden Merit cultivars.

## Popular soft fruit

Wild raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) probably arrived in Britain and Europe from Asia, but from the Middle Ages it was British and French gardeners who began selecting and breeding to produce the range

of quality cultivars we have today. Fully hardy, raspberries may well be the most popular soft fruit crop for British gardeners. This probably had little to do with the health benefits, which nevertheless are prodigious. Raspberries are high in fibre, iron, potassium, vitamins A and C and contain betacarotene (which protects against heart disease) and ellagic acid (a subject of anti-cancer research).

Late raspberries fruit in autumn because they are rapid growers, fruiting on one-year-old canes (primocanes) produced in the same year. Summer raspberries fruit primarily on canes grown the previous year. When I began growing fruit there were few autumn-fruiting cultivars: 'Zeva Herbsternte', 'All Gold' and 'Fallgold' are the ones that I recall. These are still available but have largely been replaced by better-flavoured and slightly earlier selections.

First among the new breed to have a

major impact was (now ubiquitous) well-flavoured 'Autumn Bliss'. A major advantage of autumn raspberries is the simplicity of pruning, making them ideal for novice fruit growers: merely cut all canes to ground level in late winter (January–February). Some new raspberry cultivars will actually produce two crops in the same year – autumn and the following spring – but this is not easy to achieve year-on-year, requiring cane thinning and selective pruning.

## Cultivation and training

Books will tell you that raspberries need humus-rich, free-draining, slightly acidic soil. They do best in such conditions, but I have also grown them on alkaline soil, where they may struggle somewhat against deficiencies of iron, magnesium and other trace elements (see RHS Advice, p559), but will still crop. In good conditions, a planting of raspberries will last some 12 years, perhaps eight in alkaline soil.

Choose a site that full sun reaches for at least half the day. Before planting, dig over the soil, carefully removing all perennial weed roots – once canes are growing it is almost impossible to remove couch grass and other tenacious weeds. The best time to plant is early in winter, so I recommend preparing the site as early in autumn as you can.

Improve the soil by incorporating garden compost or well-rotted manure at one barrowful (around 50kg/110 lb) to every 4–5sq m (5–6sq yd). If your soil is particularly heavy or light you may also want to add generous quantities of leafmould or municipal compost.

Plants from fruit nurseries are usually supplied as 'crowns' (young, dormant bare-root or containerised plants). Six plants will give a reasonable crop; plant with 40–50cm (15–20in) between them. If space is really tight plant a compact group of three crowns around a single stake. If you have space for more, plant in rows about 1.5–1.8m (5–6ft) apart.

The inter-row space can be a mown sward (ideally clover-rich as this 'fixes' nitrogen) or well-mulched soil. Some autumn raspberries can be grown without supports, but I find it tidier to have a simple post-and-wire system. Growing canes can be secured to a single wire about 1m (39in) above the ground in summer, and tied-in using biodegradable twine. They need less support than summer raspberries, the canes of which must withstand winter weather.

## Easy to look after

Canes will fruit at the end of their first summer. In the following February cut all stems right down to the ground, leaving as little a stub as possible. Feed in spring with garden compost or well-rotted manure, and – ideally following rain – cover the soil up to the canes in a thick mulch of straw or other organic material at least 5cm (2in) deep.

Canes of autumn-fruiting cultivars do not generally need thinning (see specific cultivar advice, right) but do need to be kept in bounds. Raspberries produce long roots not far below the surface (hence the need for humus-rich soil), which can start throwing up new canes in unexpected places. Using a sharp hoe

or secateurs, cut out any shoots emerging further than 30cm (12in) from the row.

## Avoiding disease

Most modern raspberry cultivars have good resistance to aphids, which can carry viruses, so these are less problematic than in the past. In my experience pests and diseases are less of a problem on autumn raspberries than summer-fruiting cultivars. Cane pests and diseases such as cane midge, cane spot, spur and cane blights do not get a chance to overwinter, as the canes are pruned out. In some gardens, however, raspberry beetle grubs can annoy by eating out the core.

The biggest disease problem is root rot fungus (*Phytophthora fragariae* var. *rubi*), a particular problem in wet, waterlogged soil conditions. Canes die progressively

and rapidly and there is no cure: burn affected canes, and do not replant with strawberries, which can also be infected, in the now-vacant soil.

Even a small garden can accommodate a few raspberries. Autumn-fruiting cultivars have improved hugely in the last 25 years and are remarkably easy to grow once established. Autumn may be more generally associated with the laden branches of ripening apples and pears but there is still a final lingering taste of summer sweetness to be savoured from this increasingly popular soft fruit. ■

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@ More information (including links to trials results when available): [www.rhs.org.uk/growyourown/raspberry.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/growyourown/raspberry.asp)

## AUTUMN-FRUITING CULTIVARS

- 1 'Joan Squire' – spine-free but vigorous, this cultivar can crop twice on the same canes. Needs support, however, and benefits from thinning the weaker canes.
- 2 'Polka' – a recent Polish introduction bred from 'Autumn Bliss'. Good flavour, begins cropping from late July and highly productive.
- 3 'Autumn Britten' – spiny canes and modest crops of good-sized fruit. These can be crumbly and prone to rain damage, however.
- 4 'Himbo Top' ('Rafzaqu') – a new Swiss cultivar with vigorous canes that require support. Large, pale red berries in August and September. Some resistance to root rot.
- 5 'All Gold' – a seedling from 'Autumn Bliss' with spiner canes but sweeter, yellow fruit.
- 6 'Caroline' – spiny canes. Fruit have a fair flavour, and this cultivar produced the heaviest September crops in the trial.

## Other autumn raspberries

- 'Autumn Bliss' – received Award of Garden Merit in 1993, but still hard to beat for ease of growth and flavour. Resistant to root rot, and the short, stiff canes need little support. Can crop from August until the first frosts.
- 'Autumn Treasure' – excellent cultivar, good resistance to root rot, *Verticillium* and several viruses. Spine-free, yielding reasonably on upright, sturdy canes with good flavour.
- 'Galante' – probably the largest fruit of all autumn raspberries of good flavour. Crops prolifically from August until December, showing some frost resistance. Canes can produce a second crop the following summer.
- 'Joan J' – a recent introduction, crops from late July to late September. Large, fleshy, dark red fruit on vigorous, spine-free canes, but in the trial has proved rather disease-prone.