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Cultivated blackberries: Varieties

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The cultivated blackberries are hybrid plants of the genus *Rubus*, subgenus *Eubatus*. They are only distantly related to the weed species, *Rubus fruticosus* Agg.

The following varieties are found in commerce. Descriptive notes are based on performance in Southeast Australia. Fruiting season is dependent on climate and may vary by three weeks from early to late sites. The seasonal data cited refers to the time of abundant supplies in the wholesale markets.

Description of cultivars

Frequently grown commercial varieties

Boysenberry: (Developed by Ralph Boysen, California, 1920) Derivation: *Rubus ursinus*. Vigorous, trailing canes. Flowers susceptible to damage by plague thrips. Fruits early December to mid-January. Purple-black, downy, long and plump berries up to 35mm long x 20mm diameter. Flavour is aromatic/acidic when ripe. Berries have a characteristic aroma that is a major identifier of the fruit. Both thorny and thornless forms exist. The thornless forms are periclinal chimeras (that is, only the epidermal layer of tissue is genetically thornless), and therefore suckers growing from damaged roots will be thorny. There appear to be several forms of Boysenberry in commerce; variations are seen in the ratio of fruit length:width, general vigour and productivity. The fruit are often confused with Youngberries (see below).

Chester Thornless: (USDA, Beltsville Md, 1985) Derivation: Mainly European blackberry species, x *R. alleghaniensis*. Genetic thornlessness derived from Merton Thornless. Vigorous once established, with semi-erect arching canes up to 3m. Early extended season from mid-January to mid-March. Glossy, black fruit up to 20mm long x 15mm diameter. Suits harvest at firm-ripe. Flavour is acidic until full ripe.

Dirksen Thornless: (Drs Scott, Ink and Hull, USDA, Beltsville, Md, 1974) Derivation: European blackberry species, x *R. alleghaniensis*. Genetic thornlessness is derived from Merton Thornless. Non-suckering, vigorous plant once established, with semi-erect arching canes up to 3m. Fruits from early January to late February. Glossy, black fruit up to 25mm long x 20mm diameter. Acidic flavour until full ripe and poor aroma.

Karaka Black: (HortResearch, New Zealand) Derivation: a cross between M103 and N71 featuring Aurora, Comanche and Cherokee in its parentage. Canes are moderately vigorous, trailing, less spiny than Boysen or Silvan. Long harvest period, starting about 3 weeks earlier than Boysen. Very high yield of long (up to 10cm), conical, shiny black berries with average weight of 10g. Mild blackberry flavour but rather acidic if picked slightly under-ripe. Good disease resistance to botrytis. Karaka Black is only available from Costa's BerryExchange, Corindi Beach, NSW, the holder of the Australian license.

Loch Ness: (Dr DL Jennings, Scottish Crop Research Institute (SCRI) 1990) Derivation: Mainly European blackberry species. A semi-erect thornless variety, with arching canes up to 3m length, of moderate vigour until well established. Harvest late-December to late-January. Fruit is black, glossy, resembling wild blackberry. Can be picked at firm ripe to extend shelf life. Flavour is acidic/aromatic, resembling wild blackberry.

Loganberry: (Developed by Judge Logan, California, 1880) Derivation: Auginbaugh blackberry x Red Antwerp raspberry (*Rubus ursinus* x *Rubus ideaus*). Genetic composition dominated by *R. ursinus*. A less vigorous trailing plant that may be thorny or thornless. More demanding of good soil structure. Susceptible to crown-gall, downy mildew and anthracnose. Long harvest season – mid-November to mid-January. Fruit is purple when ripe, downy, long and plump – up to 30mm long x 15mm diameter. Flavour is aromatic, distinctive and different to all other hybrid berries. Acidic until very ripe. Better suited to processing.

Marionberry: (Developed by FJ Lawrence: joint USDA – Oregon State University breeding program 1956) Derivation: mainly *R. ursinus*. Very vigorous, thorny, trailing variety, with distinctive green leaves and brittle canes. Moderate to low yields. Unless primocanes are cut back around flowering, the plants will produce few very long (6 – 7m) primocanes. Fruits late-December to mid-January. Fruit is glossy, black, long – 35mm x 10-15mm diameter. Excellent, aromatic wild blackberry flavour. Fruit sensitive to UV damage. Main value is to continue production after Silvan blackberry has finished.

Silvan blackberry: (Developed by K Kroon, Agriculture Victoria, 1962) Derivation: from seed ex Oregon State University – USDA, mainly by *R. ursinus*. Very vigorous, thorny, trailing canes. Plant tolerates heavy soils better than other early and mid-season hybrids, generally produces heavier crops. Harvests early-December to mid-January. Fruit is glossy, red-black to fully black at ripe; up to 35mm long x 20mm diameter. Soft and easily damaged at full-ripe. Excellent aromatic/acidic flavour and is the nearest flavour to the wild weed blackberry..

Youngberry: (Developed by BM Young, Louisiana, USA, 1926)) Derivation: mainly by *R. ursinus*. Similar to Boysen - vigorous, trailing thorny or thornless canes, with cropping up to two weeks earlier than .Boyden. Fruits glossier, smaller – up to 25mm long x 20mm diameter and more numerous than Boysen, with higher yield. More sensitive to anthracnose than Boysen. Similar sensitivity to thrips damage of flowers. Flavour is aromatic/acidic with a different aroma to Boysen. NZ research indicates that Youngberry pollen can cause flower failure in Boysen if grown too close together.

Minor commercial varieties

Ranui: (Bred in Nelson, NZ ca 1990, HortResearch) Derivation: Aurora x Marion. Trailing spiny canes of low to moderate vigour. Early season, harvests December, about 3 weeks earlier than Boysen. Light yield. Fruit is long, conic, glossy, soft dark red to black in colour. Flavour is sweet/acid. Not widely grown because does not fit into the

blackberry or the raspberry category due to its appearance.

Tayberry: (Dr DL Jennings and D Mason, SCRI 1962) Derivation: Complex, mainly *R. ursinus*, blackberry x hybrid raspberry. Modern version of a Loganberry. Trailing, spiny canes of low vigour. Moderate yield. Most demanding of excellent soil structure and freedom from weeds. Harvests late November to end December. Fruit is long, conic dark red – purple, 40mm long x 20mm diameter. Excellent flavour (acidic like loganberry) and highly aromatic. Outstanding flavour when processed.

Superseded varieties

Black Satin: (Drs Scott, Ink and Hull, USDA, Beltsville Md, 1974) Derivation: Mainly European blackberry species x *R. alleghaniensis*. Genetic thornlessness derived from Merton Thornless. Semi-erect, arching canes up to 3m. Vigorous once established, non-suckering. Harvest from late December to mid-February. Softer, black, glossy fruit up to 25mm long x 20mm diameter. Flavour is poorer than Thornfree; equally acidic, less sugar, equally poor aroma.

Lawtonberry: (Selected from wild, 1850 – 1870, USA) Derivation: From an eastern North American erect blackberry species, either *Rubus alleghaniensis*, *R. philadelphicus* or *R. argutus*. Vigorous, upright, thorny canes of 1.5 – 2m; suckers strongly. Harvest from early January to mid-February. Purple-black berries up to 20mm long x 15mm diameter, resembling a well-sized wild blackberry. Smaller than most cultivated blackberries. Has a better shelf-life than most. Flavour is acidic/aromatic, close to wild blackberry flavour.

Murrindindi: (Developed by GR McGregor, Agriculture Victoria, 1989) Derivation: Maternal parent of complex origin x Silvan blackberry. Genetically thornless, short trailing canes with short internodes. Moderate vigour. Harvest from mid-December to end of January. Fruit is glossy, black, up to 30 mm long x 10mm diameter, often irregular in the middle. Harvests well at firm-ripe. Good shelf-life. Acidic/aromatic flavour but lacks the intensity of aromas of Silvan blackberry.

Smoothstem: (Drs Scott and Ink, USDA, Beltsville Md, 1966) Derivation: Mainly European blackberry species x *R. alleghaniensis*. Genetic thornlessness derived from Merton Thornless, open pollinated. Semi-erect, arching canes up to 3m, bearing fruit on long laterals. Vigorous once established, non-suckering. Harvest from early February to late March. Difficult to pick firm-ripe. Black, glossy fruit up to 20mm long x 15mm diameter. Flavour is acidic/aromatic but undistinctive.

Thornfree: (Drs Scott and Ink, USDA, Beltsville Md, 1966) Derivation: Mainly European blackberry species x *R. alleghaniensis*. Genetic thornlessness derived from Merton Thornless, open pollinated. Semi-erect, arching canes up to 3m. Vigorous once established, non-suckering. Harvest from mid January to mid-March. Fruit season coincides with that of wild blackberry. Black, glossy fruit up to 20mm long x 15mm diameter. Very acidic until full ripe. First thornless cultivar introduced but now largely superseded. Flavour is acidic, lacking aromas or distinctive flavours.

Waldo: (USA) Derivation: Marion X. Short, branched, thornless canes, with extremely short fruiting laterals. Semi-evergreen. Fruit closely packed so difficult to pick and prone to botrytis rot. Slow to establish. Heavy yield per metre

of cane. Harvest in January, about 2 weeks later than Boysen. Fat conical, glossy soft sweet fruit with small seeds. Very high drupelet count. Excellent, typical blackberry flavour. Leaves, but not fruit, prone to mite and thrips damage. Suitable for home gardens.

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