



How to Grow Raspberries

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September 2026



How to Grow Raspberries in the UK

A good row of raspberries is one of the best deals in the whole garden. A handful of canes costs very little, takes up a strip of ground most people waste, and then crops generously every summer or autumn for a decade or more. The canes I put in along the back fence in Oxfordshire have paid me back many times over, and the truth is they ask for almost nothing in return beyond a yearly cut and a bit of feeding. Shop-bought raspberries are expensive and often disappointing, soft and watery by the time they reach you. Ones you pick warm off your own cane are a completely different fruit.

Raspberries also suit beginners because the plant does most of the work. There's no sowing, no transplanting, no fussing over seedlings. You plant a dormant cane, give it something to lean on, and it gets on with it. The two things that trip people up are choosing the right type in the first place and knowing how and when to prune, and both of those are easy once someone explains them properly. This guide covers the whole thing from planting to picking, including the pruning that catches almost everyone out.

Summer or Autumn? The First Choice to Make

Before you buy a single cane, you need to know that raspberries come in two types, and they are pruned in completely different ways. Get this clear at the start and everything else falls into place. Get it wrong and you end up cutting off the very canes that were about to fruit, which is the single most common raspberry mistake I see.

Summer-fruiting raspberries crop heavily for a few weeks in midsummer, usually late June into July. They fruit on canes that grew the previous year, so the wood is two seasons in the making. These are the classic raspberry, varieties like 'Glen Ample' and 'Malling Jewel', and they need support and a bit more attention to pruning.

Autumn-fruiting raspberries crop from late August right through to the first frosts on canes that grew the same year. They are shorter, often need no support, and they are far easier to prune, which makes them the ones I always recommend to beginners. 'Autumn Bliss' and 'Polka' are reliable and heavy croppers. If you only grow one type, grow autumn raspberries, then add a summer variety later if you want to stretch the season. The Royal Horticultural Society keeps a useful list of recommended cultivars for both types on its raspberries grow-your-own page.

The clever move, once you have room, is to grow both. A few summer canes and a few autumn canes will give you fresh raspberries from late June until the cold weather stops them in October or November. That is four or five months of picking from a strip of ground barely a metre wide.

When to Plant Raspberries in the UK

The best time to plant raspberries in the UK is from late autumn to early spring, roughly November to March, while the canes are dormant and bare-rooted. This is when they are cheapest, establish best, and are sold as bundles of bare canes by garden centres and suppliers like Thompson and Morgan. Plant them as soon as you can after they arrive, as long as the ground is not frozen or waterlogged. If it is, heel them into a spare bit of soil or a pot of compost and wait for a better day.

You can also buy raspberries growing in pots, and these can go in at almost any time of year as long as you keep them watered through their first summer. They cost more and you get fewer plants for your money, but they are useful if you have missed the bare-root window. For timing everything else across the year, my UK Vegetable Planting Calendar is worth keeping to hand.

How to Plant Raspberries



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Position and Soil

Raspberries want a sunny, sheltered spot, though they will tolerate light shade better than most fruit and still crop, which is handy if your garden has an awkward corner. What they will not tolerate is waterlogging. They hate sitting in cold, wet ground over winter, and heavy soil that puddles after rain will rot the roots. If you are not sure what you are working with, my guide to telling whether your soil is clay, loam or sand will show you in five minutes. On my heavier clay I plant raspberries on a slightly raised ridge and dig in plenty of grit and compost first, which has made all the difference.

They prefer a slightly acidic, fertile soil with plenty of organic matter. Before planting, fork in a generous amount of well-rotted manure or garden compost along the whole row. This is the one big feed that sets them up for years, so do not skimp on it.

Spacing and Planting Depth

Plant the canes about 40cm apart in a row, with rows around 1.5m apart if you are growing more than one. Spread the roots out in a wide shallow hole and plant so the old soil mark on the cane sits at the surface. The crucial thing is not to plant too deep, because raspberries are shallow-rooted and burying the crown causes problems. Firm them in gently, water well, and then cut the canes down to about 25cm above the ground after planting. It feels brutal, but it forces strong new growth from the base instead of weak fruiting on the old stick.

Supporting and Training the Canes

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Tie the canes along the wires like a fan so light and air get through.

Summer-fruiting raspberries grow tall and will flop without support, so they need a framework. The simplest is a post-and-wire system: a stout post at each end of the row with two or three horizontal wires stretched between them at roughly 60cm, 90cm and 1.5m. Tie the canes in along the wires as they grow, spacing them out like a fan so light and air get through. It keeps the fruit off the ground and makes picking far easier.

Autumn raspberries are shorter and sturdier and often manage without any support at all, which is another reason they suit a smaller or lower-effort garden. If they do start to lean in an exposed spot, a single line of string run along both sides of the row between a couple of canes is usually enough to keep them upright..

Growing Raspberries in Pots

You can grow raspberries in pots, and it works better than you might expect, especially with the shorter autumn varieties. Use a large container, at least 40cm to 50cm wide and deep, as raspberries are thirsty and hungry and a small pot will dry out and starve them. Three or four canes to a big pot is about right. Fill it with a good loam-based compost mixed with some organic matter, and add a few crocks or some grit at the bottom for drainage, since the one thing that kills potted raspberries is waterlogging.

The trade-off with containers is that you must water far more often, sometimes daily in a hot spell, and feed regularly through the growing season because the roots cannot range for nutrients. Autumn-fruiting varieties are the best choice for pots because they stay compact, need no staking, and crop on the current year's canes, so pruning is as simple as cutting the whole lot down each winter.

Feeding, Mulching and Watering

Raspberries are not demanding, but a little attention pays off in fruit. In late winter or early spring, scatter a general-purpose fertiliser along the row, then mulch generously with well-rotted manure, compost or leaf mould. The mulch feeds the soil, locks in moisture, and keeps the weeds down, which matters because raspberries hate competition at their shallow roots. A thick yearly mulch is genuinely the most useful thing you can do for them. If you are not making your own yet, my guide to composting at home covers how to get a steady supply.

Keep the row weeded by hand or hoe very shallowly, because deep digging near the canes tears the surface roots. Water well in dry spells, particularly while the fruit is swelling, as this is when a drought will cost you the most. Beyond that, they really do look after themselves.

How and When to Prune Raspberries



Summer types: out with the old canes, in with the new. Autumn types: cut the lot.

This is the part everyone worries about, and it is genuinely simple once you remember the one rule: prune them according to their type. Cut the wrong canes and you remove next year's crop, which is exactly the mistake I made in my first year when I sheared a whole row of summer canes to the ground in autumn and got almost nothing the following July.

Summer-fruiting raspberries: after they finish cropping in summer, cut out the canes that just fruited right down to the ground. These are the older, darker, woodier canes. Leave the fresh green canes that grew this year, because those are what will fruit next summer. Tie those new canes in to the wires and you are done. The rule is simple: out with the old, in with the new.

Autumn-fruiting raspberries: this is even easier. In late winter, around February, cut every single cane down to ground level. All of it. The plant then throws up fresh canes in spring that fruit the same autumn. One cut a year, no deciding which cane is which, no support to fuss with. This is why I push beginners towards autumn varieties. If you want a visual to be sure, BBC Gardeners' World has clear guides to pruning raspberries for both types.

Harvesting Raspberries



A net over the row is the difference between your crop and the blackbirds' crop.

Raspberries are ready when they are fully coloured and pull away from the central plug with the gentlest tug. A ripe raspberry almost falls into your hand; if you have to pull, it is not ready. Pick every couple of days through the season, because they ripen fast and the birds will find them the moment you stop paying attention. A fine bird net thrown over the row in summer saves a surprising amount, as blackbirds in particular will strip a cane while your back is turned.

Common Raspberry Problems

Birds stripping the fruit. The biggest pest by far. Net the row as the berries start to colour, or use a fruit cage if you grow a lot.

Canes spreading everywhere. Raspberries sucker and will wander into paths and beds. Dig up stray canes in spring, or sink a barrier along the edge of the row to keep them in bounds.

Grey mould on the fruit. Botrytis in a wet summer turns berries furry and grey. Pick regularly, remove affected fruit, and keep the canes well spaced so air moves through.

Yellowing leaves between the veins. Often iron or magnesium shortage on alkaline soil, since raspberries prefer slightly acidic ground. Mulch with ericaceous matter and feed.

Slugs on new shoots and low fruit. They nibble emerging canes and any berries near the ground. How to get rid of slugs in the garden covers safe ways to protect them.

Poor cropping. Usually too much shade, a dry spell while fruiting, or pruning at the wrong time. Check you are pruning for the right type and keep them watered and mulched.

Common Questions About Growing Raspberries

How do you grow raspberries in the UK?

Plant bare-root raspberry canes from late autumn to early spring in a sunny, sheltered, well-drained spot, spacing them about 40cm apart and not too deeply. Dig in plenty of well-rotted manure first, support summer-fruiting types with posts and wires, mulch and feed each spring, water in dry spells, and prune according to whether they are summer or autumn varieties. They will then crop for ten years or more.

When should you plant raspberries in the UK?

The best time to plant raspberries in the UK is from November to March, while the canes are dormant and sold bare-rooted. Plant as soon as conditions allow, avoiding frozen or waterlogged ground. Pot-grown raspberries can be planted at most times of year if you keep them well watered through their first summer.

What is the difference between summer and autumn raspberries? Summer-fruiting raspberries crop heavily for a few weeks in midsummer on canes that grew the previous year, and need support and careful pruning. Autumn-fruiting raspberries crop from late summer into autumn on canes that grew the same year, are shorter, often need no support, and are pruned simply by cutting everything to the ground in winter. Autumn types are easier for beginners.

How do you prune raspberries?

It depends on the type. For summer-fruiting raspberries, cut the canes that have just fruited down to the ground after harvest and keep the fresh new canes for next year. For autumn-fruiting raspberries, cut every cane down to ground level in late winter, around February, and the plant grows fresh canes that fruit the same autumn.

Can you grow raspberries in pots?

Yes. Use a large container at least 40cm to 50cm wide and deep with a loam-based compost and good drainage, and plant three or four canes. Autumn-fruiting varieties suit pots best because they stay compact and need no support. Water frequently, sometimes daily in summer, and feed regularly, as potted raspberries dry out and run short of nutrients faster than those in the ground.

How far apart should you plant raspberry canes?

Plant raspberry canes about 40cm apart along the row, with rows spaced roughly 1.5m apart if you grow more than one. Plant them at the same depth they were grown, with the old soil mark at the surface, as raspberries are shallow-rooted and dislike being planted too deep.

How long do raspberry plants live?

A well-looked-after raspberry row will crop productively for around ten to twelve years, sometimes longer. Yields gradually decline as the planting ages and gets congested, at which point it is best to start a fresh row in a new spot with fresh canes, as raspberries dislike being replanted in old raspberry ground.

A Sensible Place to Start

If you have never grown raspberries, keep it simple. This winter, buy a bundle of bare-root autumn-fruiting canes such as 'Autumn Bliss' or 'Polka'. Dig plenty of well-rotted manure into a sunny, well-drained strip of ground, plant the canes 40cm apart at the same depth they were grown, water them in, and cut them down to about 25cm. Then mulch them well and leave them be.

In their first autumn you will get a light crop, and from the second year a proper one. Each February, cut the whole lot to the ground, mulch again in spring, and water in dry spells while the fruit swells. That is the entire job, one cut and one feed a year, for a decade of raspberries off a metre of ground. Once you have the hang of it, add a summer variety to stretch the season from June right through to the first frosts.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

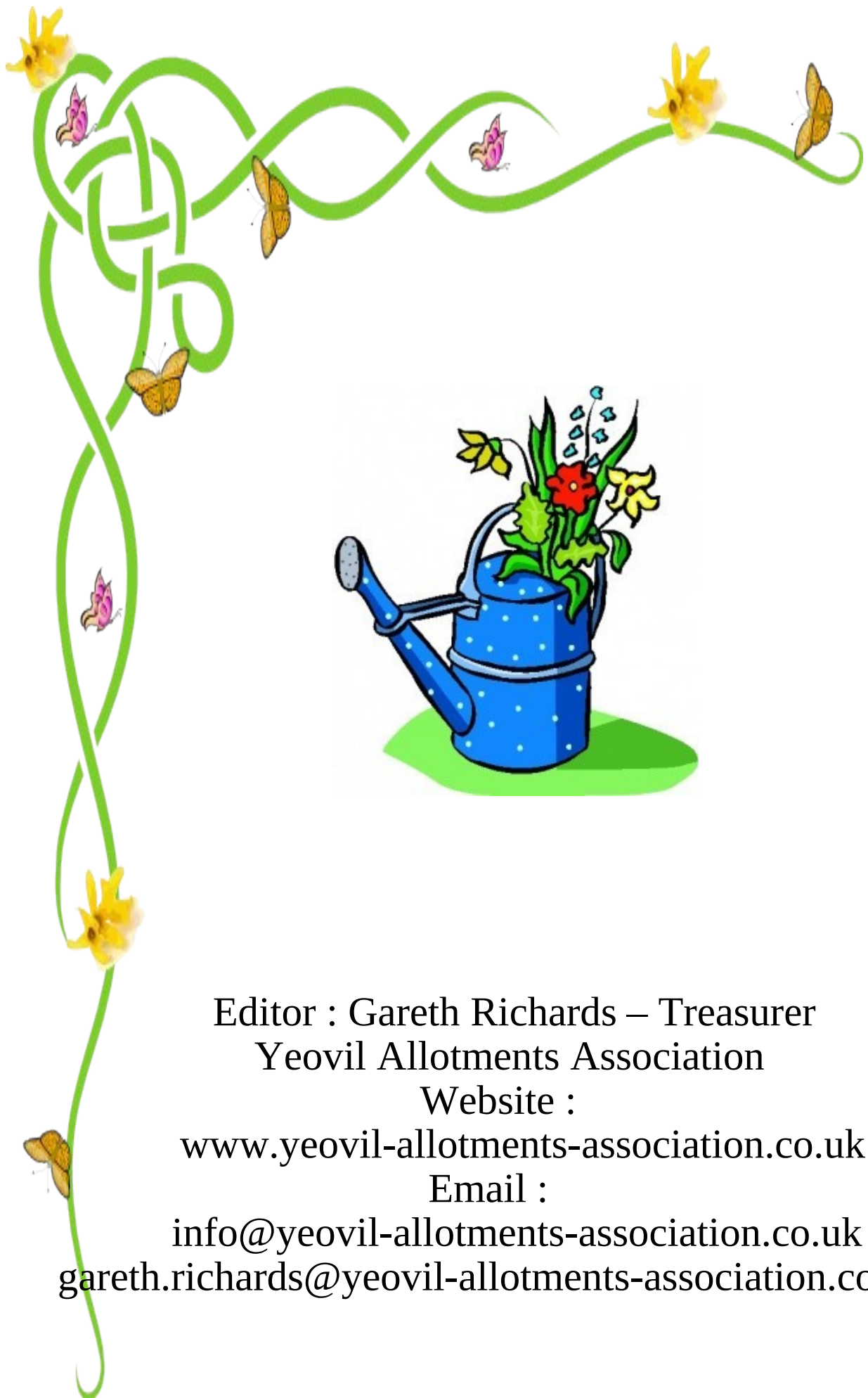
We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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