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Wild Blackberries *(Rubus species)*



Blackberry PDF

From [Stalking the Wild Dandelion](#)

A Guide to Wild Edible Plants for Parents
and Teachers to Use With Children

A new, as yet unpublished, work-in-progress.



Common Blackberry Branch

In the second half of the summer these superb berries ripen successively over a period of weeks.

Description:

Tall, thorny, arching cane with palmate-compound leaves, white, 5-petaled flowers and familiar fruit; flowers white to pinkish, 5-petaled, radially-symmetrical 3/4 inch across, with many bushy stamens, in loose clusters; fruit aggregate, black, elliptical, faceted, 1/2 to 1-1/2 inches long; leaves palmate-compound, up to 7 inches long, 3 to 7-parted, leaflets sharply toothed, up to 2 inches long; stem biennial cane trailing or up to 9 feet tall, arching, reddish-brown, sharply thorny; roots perennial.

Wild blackberries are like the ones you buy, but better. Among the best-known berries in America, you can find them wherever you live. The toothed leaves are compound —divided into segments, called leaflets. Since the leaflets, like your fingers, originate from a point rather than a line, the leaves are called palmate-compound. Each leaf usually has 3-7 sharply-toothed leaflets.



Common Blackberry in Flower

These open flowers are available to any nectar-seeking insects, whether or not they're effective pollinators.

In the spring, sweet-smelling, white, 5-petaled, radially-symmetrical flowers about as wide as a quarter drape the bushes.



Common Blackberry Flowers

Note the many bushy pollen-containing (male) stamens surrounding the central (female) pistils.

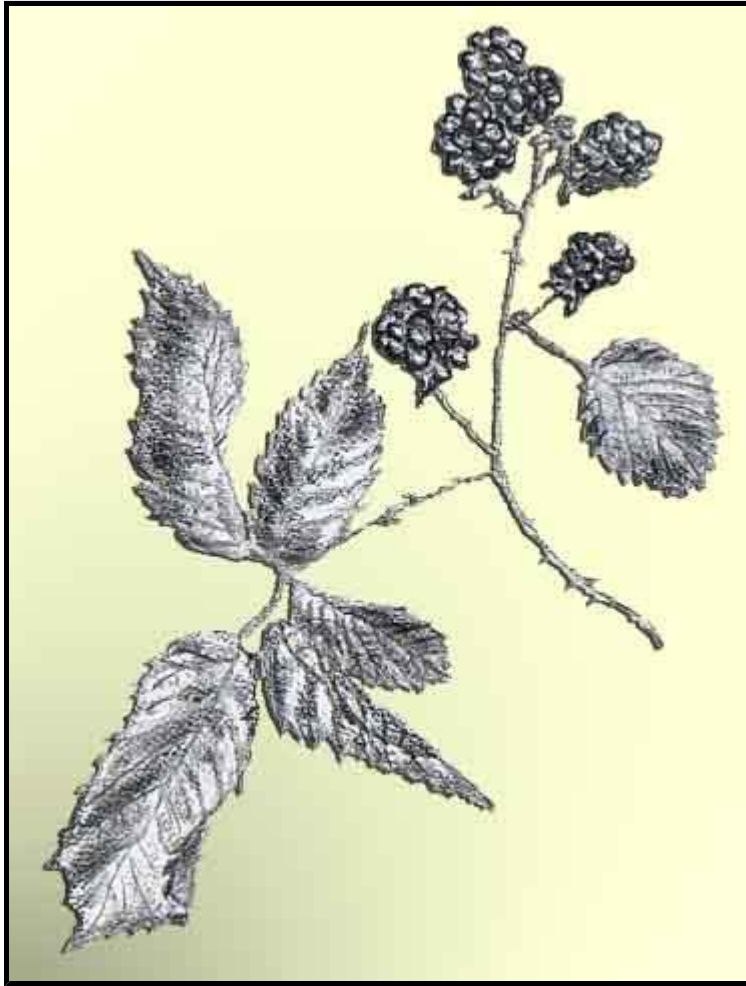
The fruit, which ripens from mid-summer to early fall, goes from green to red to black.



Common Blackberry with Ripe and Unripe Fruit

Note: On the upper left, unlike raspberries, there's no *receptacle* protruding from the stem after the fruit has been removed.

The berry is really made up of lots of tiny, round, shiny berries stuck together—an aggregate fruit. Each tiny berry in the cluster has its own seed, so one animal eating one fruit spreads many seeds.



Common Blackberry Branch With Berries

Beware of the sharp, curved thorns, and of [poison ivy](#), which has similar leaves and often grows along with blackberries.

People sometimes confuse [raspberry](#) fruits with blackberries. A raspberry is hollow. When you pick it, it leaves a cone-shaped receptacle behind.



Wineberry (a species of raspberry) Receptacle

Note: Blackberries lack these.

The receptacle comes off along with the blackberry, so it's never hollow.

Blackberry branches' edges are flattened, not round like raspberries. Along with the very sharp thorns, this makes them easy to recognize out of season, so you'll know where to collect the following summer.

Mulberries, also edible, resemble blackberries, but they grow on thornless trees, not thorny canes, in late spring and early summer.

Look for blackberries in thickets, along roadsides and the trail edges, in fields, on mountains, in young woodlands, and near the seashore.



Blackberry Picker in a Thicket

Some species grow taller than an adult, others trail along the ground. Even thornless species grow cultivated in some parks and gardens.



Cut-leaf Blackberry

This tasty European species is commonly planted in urban and suburban parks. It has more deeply-cut leaves than the American common blackberry. The ripe fruit is large and sweet.



Dewberries

This blackberry species, which comes into season weeks earlier than its relatives, trails the ground. The fruit is wonderful!



Dewberry Flower

This flower is very similar to that of the common blackberry.

These brambles bear such sharp thorns, people used to plant them, along with hawthorns, along boundaries:

*Go plough up, or delve up, advised with skill,
The breadth of a ridge, and in length as ye will,
Then speedily quickset, for a fence ye will draw
To sow in the seed of the bramble and haw.*

—Thomas Tusser

Pick berries that come off the bush easily. These are the ripest and tastiest. Eat as is, add to cereal, drinks, pies, cakes, fruit sauces, or fruit salads. Try creating your own blackberry recipes.

Caution: Kids who race recklessly for the best berries often get scratched. Wear old clothes when you collect. The thorns may tear them, and the berries, which are good for dyeing, may stain clothing.

[Poison ivy](#) often grows near blackberries, and they looks somewhat similar, but poison ivy always has three leaflets, no teeth on the leaf margins, and no thorns.

*My berries cluster black and thick
For rich and poor alike to pick.
I'll tear your dress, and cling, and tease,
And scratch your hand and arms and
knees.
I'll stain your fingers and your face,
And then I'll laugh at your disgrace.
But when the bramble-jelly's made,
You'll find your trouble well repaid.*

—THE SONG OF THE BLACKBERRY QUEEN
by Cicely Mary Barker

THE DEVIL AND THE BLACKBERRIES English Legend

The English tell you never to eat blackberries after early autumn. Here's why: When the Devil was kicked out of Heaven on October 11, he landed, cursing and screaming, on a thorny blackberry bush.



That really hurt!

He avenges himself on the same day every year by spitting on the berries, which makes them inedible. (Some people say he pees on the blackberries!) He avenges himself on the same day every year by peeing on the berries, which makes them unfit for human consumption.

THE BLACKBERRY BUSH, THE CORMORANT, AND THE BAT
—English Folk Tale

Once upon a time, a cormorant (a seabird that dives for fish), a bat, and a blackberry bush entered the wool business together, buying, shipping, and selling wool.



Clipper Ship

Unfortunately, their ship, loaded with wool, sank on its first voyage, and their business went belly-up. (This was before you could declare chapter 11 — bankruptcy).

Ever since, the cormorant dives into the sea looking for the ship. The bat hides from his creditors in a cave, venturing forth only after dark. And the blackberry bush grabs wool from any passing sheep, trying to replace his loss.



Cormorant Drying its Wings After an Unsuccessful Dive

The blackberry is also the symbol of envy, lowliness, and remorse. This is because its thorns can catch you, trip you up, and hold on to you.

Blackberry bushes and other brambles can take over a habitat and choke out other plants, the way an greedy person may try to take things from others. So people in Shakespeare's day called lawyers bramble bushes, because they grab on to you and don't let go until they've drawn blood. Seems like these brambles haven't changed much in 500 years!



Don't get caught up in this type of bramble!

Blackberries are such important plants in our environment and such a delicious wild food, I don't mind the thorns.

People would use blackberry bushes to magically cure whooping cough: They'd pass the victim under the arching bramble seven times, reciting:

*In bramble, out cough.
Here I leave the whooping cough.*

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An [article](#) by "Wildman"

[Early American Life Magazine](#), August 2006

[Foraging for Brambles](#)

An [article](#) by "Wildman"

[Vegetarian Journal](#), Issue 3, 2006

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