



Most of the big-fruited, thornless selections had their beginnings in the research plots of the University of Arkansas, currently directed by Dr. John Clark, who has been working on these blackberries for 35 years. “Our blackberry program has impacts all around the world,” observes Clark. Thanks to decades of work, a wayside berry has turned into a crop worthy of a garden, a farm or, more importantly, your table.

### A Year in the Life

Unlike shrubs or trees, blackberries are perennials that renew from the ground. They have vegetative canes called primocanes that, for most selections, become fruiting floricanes. No cane lives longer than two seasons. When an established plant breaks dormancy in spring, floricanes put out leaves, bloom and begin developing fruit. Meanwhile, the new shoots called primocanes begin to emerge just at or below soil level. As soon as the berries ripen and are picked, it is recommended that the spent floricanes be removed by cutting them to the ground. The primocanes will continue to grow for the next season, becoming floricanes.

Not only is picking easier when plants are thornless, but so is pruning. Once you decide to grow the thornless ones, there are no bad choices. By growing several selections, you can extend

your harvest to about five weeks. Below are a few selections Clark recommends.

### Cold Hardiness

Blackberries are almost a sure bet in USDA zones 7, 8 and 9, with good possibilities in Zone 6. Where plants are marginal, some growers are using a trellis that can be collapsed and then sheltered with a row cover.

When considering his thornless selections, Clark recommends, “Ouachita is best, based on last winter,” meaning that Ouachita tolerated the cold better than others. On the other hand, continues, Clark, “Chester Thornless is not an Arkansas development, but it is likely the hardiest of the thornless. It is a high-chill, semi-erect, USDA development. It is very productive, but tart.”

Always check the chilling requirements for the different selections and choose the best match for your climate. Also check with your local Extension Service to learn what has worked and what has not. **FL**

For more on growing blackberries and new primocane fruiting selections, see [myFarmLife.com/blackberries](http://myFarmLife.com/blackberries).

| NAME            | WE LOVE IT BECAUSE ...                                    | GOOD TO KNOW                                     | APPROX. DATE RIPENING IN ARKANSAS |
|-----------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>NATCHEZ</b>  | Early, large, can be tart                                 | Needs trellis, 300–400 hours chilling*           | June 5                            |
| <b>OSAGE</b>    | Newest, flavorful, medium size, best storage and shipping | Erect (trellis optional), 300–400 hours chilling | June 8                            |
| <b>OUACHITA</b> | Best-selling, high yields                                 | Erect (trellis optional), 400 hours chilling     | June 12                           |
| <b>NAVAHO</b>   | Medium-size berry   | Erect (trellis optional), 800 hours chilling     | June 20                           |
| <b>APACHE</b>   | High yield, some white drupe imperfections                | Erect (trellis optional), 800 hours chilling     | June 25                           |