Pruning Raspberries and Mulching for Weed Control

[Jim Kropf]

Raspberries; most people top raspberries in late winter or early spring. Here's an example of a summer bearing raspberry plant that would have been topped probably last March. You can see right here at the tip where it would have been cut off right above a fruiting bud. What this does is it significantly reduces the height of the raspberry, plus it promotes the fruiting laterals to develop from each of those buds. Here's one fruiting lateral, quite often these will be up to a foot and a half long and along this is where the fruit were produced. You can see where the last year's fruit was harvested. And fruiting laterals will be developed as you go down the cane. Here's another one, here's another one, and so on all the way down the cane. If this was not topped in late winter these canes will get up to twelve to fourteen feet long and the only fruit that's going to be produced will be on the very top of the cane. So by topping this plant right at five feet, you can go a little bit higher but five feet is the traditional height, it's going to significantly reduce the height and increased the fruiting of the plant many times over.

One of the fall maintenance practices that we have to do on most of our raspberries is pruning out the old growth. And you can see the raspberries that were produced during the past summer that are still hanging here that weren't harvested. The floricanes that produced these raspberries on our summer bearing raspberry varieties all die during July-August-September of each year and they must be pruned out. On our single wire trellis system that we have in this patch you can see that we trellised up or connected the berry canes to the wire with twine. You can go ahead and just allow this to fall to the ground and since it is natural fiber it will go ahead and decompose. You can see the canes here that have all lost their leaves, have some berries that are dried up and hanging and must be pruned out. So you will go down to the ground level, just a couple inches above the ground, and find where those canes are connected to the crown and about three inches above, go ahead and prune out that cane. Each will have up to eight or nine or more canes that need to be pruned out. The last one; and you get an idea of the old bark that's hanging on there that shows the older canes. Now if you wait until spring you can go ahead and prune these out also, for some people it is harder to tell which are the old canes and which are the new canes because all the leaves will have fallen off the canes, but you can just scratch the surface of a cane and see if there's green underneath, and if there's green that will be live bark and will be your next year's production.

Okay here are the Tulamine raspberries in the fall. This is already prepared going into the fall season, we've narrowed the number of canes in this hill or stool down to one, two, three, four, five, six, seven large vigorous canes. Overproduction of canes per stool will cause a resulting loss of diameter of each cane. In some home gardens you can see rows that are up to three feet wide with over thirty canes per stool and some of the canes will be so spindly, sometimes like this, that they won't even hardly be able to stand up and support themselves. So having a small number of canes in the eight to ten, maybe twelve will keep very vigorous canes. You'd also like to keep the diameter or the width of this row down to about eighteen inches and that will definitely help
maintain larger more vigorous canes. Another thing that’s very important for raspberry production is the use of mulch. And you can see a nice layer of mulch, about three inches thick of shavings. Sawdust tends to be too fine, beauty bark is not always a very good alternative. Just wood shavings that’ll maintain aeration, keep in the moisture, keep the soil temperatures more uniform and also important, keep down the weeds. And you can see in here that there is complete absence of any type of weeds: annual weeds, perennial weeds, grasses, broadleaf, it doesn’t matter it’s been very well maintained and the mulch will certainly help keep down any weeds that emerge from seeds. If we do have invasive creeping perennials such as field bindweed or hedge bindweed or quack grass or horsetail, those are going to be able to come up through the mulch. However, anything that does come up or germinate from seed should be able to be kept out because of the thick layer of mulch. We don’t traditionally use black plastic or other similar mulches because the canes are coming up from the crown below the mulch and the plastic won’t allow the canes to pop up because we do have a solid surface instead of having a porous surface such as with the shavings.