Berries

- **Tayberry**: Early; berries large, medium red, soft, flavor distinctive; thorny.

- **Thornless Evergreen**: Late; berries medium, dark black, firm, mild flavor; very productive, suckers from roots may be thorny.

- **Waldo**: Midseason; berries medium, glossy black, firm, mild flavor; thornless, productive.

- **Young**: Midseason; berries very large, maroon, sweet, excellent flavor.

It is best to purchase certified disease-free plants from a nursery. Although propagating your own berry plants is very easy to do, plants derived from a neighbor’s canes could introduce unwanted root-rot organisms or viruses into your garden.

**Soil Requirements**

Blackberries do best in well-drained sandy or loamy soils with a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. A good supply of organic matter in the soil improves aeration and drainage and increases water-holding capacity. You may apply organic matter during the summer or fall before you plant. Incorporate about 1 pound per square foot (4.8 kg/sq m) of fully decomposed organic matter such as compost into the soil before making raised beds. Raw organic matter sources such as manure, straw, or peat moss can also be used but should be allowed to decompose in the soil for several months prior to planting. Do not incorporate raw, high-carbon forms of organic matter such as sawdust, wood chips, or rice hulls. These materials should be used only as surface mulches to avoid tying up nitrogen during their decomposition.

**Raised Beds**

Raised beds improve the drainage and growth of blackberries considerably by decreasing the negative effects of heavy soils, heavy winter rains, or excessive summer irrigation. Raised beds are constructed by shoveling soil from the aisles (the area between the rows) to form beds 2 feet (60 cm) wide at the top that widen to 4 feet (120 cm) at the base. Beds are generally 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 cm) high and can be as long as you desire. See figure 16.1 for the approximate dimensions of cane and bush berry raised beds.

**Planting Requirements**

Plant berries in the fall, winter, or as early as you can work the soil in the spring. Dig a shallow hole just large enough to accommodate the roots, prune off any damaged root parts, spread the root mass, and set the plant at about the same depth it was in the nursery. Cover the roots with soil and press firmly to remove air pockets. Water the plants to settle the soil. Cut the canes on newly set plants to 6 inches (15 cm) at planting time. For best sun exposure, plant rows in a north-south direction, if possible.

**Spacing**

Space all cultivars 2 to 4 feet (0.6 to 1.2 m) apart in the row, leaving 8 to 10 feet (2.4 to 3 m) between rows. Blackberries tend to produce few root suckers, but new canes emerge every year from the crown area.

**Trellis Systems**

Trailing blackberries require a trellis system to support the fruiting canes the second year. Erect blackberries grow without support, but trellises will keep the planting neater and make harvest easier. Therefore, it is advisable to trellis all blackberries (fig. 16.2). Set heavy posts at least 2 feet (60 cm) into the ground at

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**Figure 16.2**

Three-wire trellis for trailing blackberries during the growing season (leaves not shown for clarity). (A) Canes that have just borne fruit and will die. (B) New growth that will bear fruit the following year. Source: After Strik 1993, p. 5.