

## BLACKBERRY



"Rubus fruticosus owoce 646" by Pleple2000 - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubus\\_fruticosus\\_owoce\\_646.jpg#/media/File:Rubus\\_fruticosus\\_owoce\\_646.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubus_fruticosus_owoce_646.jpg#/media/File:Rubus_fruticosus_owoce_646.jpg)

### *Rubus fruticosus*

[ROO-bus froo-tih-KOH-sus]

**Family:** Rosaceae

**Names:** Bramble, brambleberry; Allegheny Blackberry, European Blackberry, Bly, Bogurtlen, Blackberry Bramble, Bramble-Kite, Brambleberry, Brummel, Bumble-Kite, Common Blackberry, Gewone Braam, Rovo, Scaldhead, Wild blackberry; Ozyna, Jezyna (Polish); Brombeere (German)

**Pharmaceutical Name:** Herbage: Herba Rubi fruticosi; leaves: Folia Rubi fruticosi

**Description:** Sprawling shrub with woody and densely prickled stems. The trailing, tenacious stems can extend to 15 feet and can easily root when in contact with the ground. The dark green leaves are grouped in threes or fives and are covered with fine hairs; the edges are serrated. White or pale pink flowers appear from mid-summer to mid-autumn followed by

fleshy berries that ripen to black. Flowers and fruit may appear together on the same plant. The blackberry has what is called an 'aggregate fruit', with each small and separate ovary developing to become a black fleshy globule and containing a seed; twenty or more of these may combine to form the 'blackberry'.

*R. fruticosus* is an aggregate species made up of several hundred slightly differing species. The reason for this is that most seed is produced by a non-sexual method (Apomixis) and is therefore genetically identical to the parent plant. On occasions when sexual production of seed takes place the offspring will all be slightly different from the parent plant and will then usually reproduce as a new species by means of apomixy. Modern treatment of this aggregate usually does not use the name *R. fruticosus* because of the confusion over which species it should apply to, the type species of the aggregate should be called *R. ulmifolius*.

**Cultivation:** The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils, requires well-drained soil and can grow in nutritionally poor soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils and can grow in very acid and very alkaline soils. It can grow in full shade (deep woodland) semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It requires moist soil and can tolerate drought. The plant can tolerate strong winds but not maritime exposure. Plants are spread by seed deposited in the droppings of birds and mammals. They often spring up in burnt-over, logged or abandoned land and make an excellent pioneer species, creating the right conditions for woodland trees to move in. The trees will often grow in the middle of a clump of blackberries, the prickly stems protecting them from rabbits.

Easily grown in a good well-drained loamy soil. Succeeds in acid and calcareous soils. Tolerates poor soils. Established plants are drought resistant. Succeeds in sun or semi-shade, though it fruits less well in the shade. Plants will also fruit when grown in fairly deep shade or against a north facing wall, though the fruit will ripen later. Plants tolerate quite severe exposure. Hardy to at least 14°F. Plants in this genus are notably susceptible to honey fungus.

The seed requires stratification and is best sown in early autumn in a cold frame. Stored seed requires one month stratification at about 35°F and is best sown as early as possible in the year. Prick out the seedlings when they are large enough to handle and grow on in a cold frame. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring of the following year. Cuttings of half-ripe wood, July/August in a frame. Tip layering can be done in July. Plant out in autumn. Division is done in early spring or just before leaf-fall in the autumn. The leaves are picked in summer, the berries in summer and autumn.

**History:** The name of the bush is derived from *brambel*, or *brymbyl*, signifying prickly. It is mentioned in the Bible in the of Jonathan, when he upbraided the men of Shechem for their ingratitude to his father's house, relating to them the parable of the trees choosing a king, the humble bramble being finally elected, after the olive, fig-tree and vine had refused the dignity. The ancient Greeks knew Blackberries well, and considered them a remedy for gout.

Fruticosus comes from the Latin for shrubby. In Europe, blackberries have been gathered from the wild for thousands of years. The juicy berries are traditionally made into jelly, pies, wine and vinegar, and from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century sweetened blackberry juice, plus spices and brandy, was considered an excellent cordial. In England, there are old country superstitions about the correct time for picking blackberries. According to legend, the devil fell from heaven on to a black berry bush, and any blackberries picked after Michaelmas (September 29) will have the devil's spittle on them. Arching blackberry runners that had

rooted at both ends were credited with magical properties: in parts of England, children with hernias were pushed under arched runners for a magical cure. In ancient times both the flowers and fruit were regarded as a cure for a serpent's bite. Roman physicians would boil the roots in wine and administer as an astringent. In European folk medicine, blackberry leaves have long been used for washing and staunching wounds. In Cornwall, a person suffering from boils, would crawl, or be dragged through the bramble hoops.

**Constituents:** Leaves: tannins, flavonoids, and gallic acid. Fruit: anthocyanins, pectin, fruit acids, and vitamin C

**Properties:** Astringent; Depurative; Diuretic; Tonic; Vulnerary.

**Medicinal Uses:** The root-bark and the leaves are strongly astringent, depurative, diuretic, tonic and vulnerary. Blackberry-leaf tea is a domestic remedy for sore throats, diarrhea, and hemorrhoids. It is reputed to clean the kidneys and urinary tract of stones and gravel. Chewing the fresh leaves is an ancient cure for bleeding or spongy gums. The leaves can also be used as a gargle to treat sore throats, mouth ulcers and gum inflammations. A decoction of the leaves is useful as a gargle in treating thrush and also makes a good general mouthwash. The fresh, lightly boiled leaves were applied to piles, and blackberry vinegar is a home remedy of long standing for feverish colds. The berries make a pleasant gargle for swallowing.

**Dosage:** Simmer two tsp of the root per cup of water for 20 minutes, and take a quarter cup four times a day

**Homeopathy:** Homeopaths use *Rubus villosus* for diarrhea of infancy, with water and clay-colored stool.

**Ritual Uses:** Herb of Venus and Aries; Herbe of Protection. This is a Goddess herb and sacred to Brighid, the leaves and berries used to

attract wealth or healing. The leaves are said to be still in use in England as a remedy for burns and scalds; formerly their operation was helped by a spoken charm. Creeping under a Bramble-bush was itself a charm against rheumatism, boils, blackheads, etc. Blackberries were in olden days supposed to give protection against all "evil runes," if gathered at the right time of the Moon. The whole plant had a popular reputation both as a medicine and as a charm for various disorders. Blackberry leaves may be used in magickal healing. It is also possible to dry the fruit and powder it, making a very pleasing infusion or tea for used in the ritual cup when working rituals for health and healing. Blackberry brambles may be gathered and woven into pentagrams or wreaths, hung in suspicious locations within the home to provide protection.

**Other Uses:** A purple to dull blue dye is obtained from the fruit. A fiber is obtained from the stem and used to make twine.

Dye Recipe:

1 pot blackberry shoots

1/3 cup alum

1 Tbsp cream of tartar

3 cups boiling water

1/4 tsp iron

1 lb wool

8 gallons water

Dissolve the cream of tartar in 1 cup boiling water and put it into a pot containing 4 gallons of water. Dissolve the alum in another cup of boiling water and add it to the pot. Thoroughly wet the wool and put it into the water also. Slowly bring the pot to simmer and hold it there for 45 minutes. Cool the wool in the pot. Meanwhile, chop up the young blackberry shoots, cover them with water and boil them for 1 hour. Strain and add enough water to make 4 gallons. Dissolve the iron in 1 cup boiling water and add it to the blackberry ooze. Also add the wet alum-mordanted wool into the ooze and slowly bring it to a simmer, maintaining the temperature for 45 minutes or so. Add more iron for a darker gray. Cool and rinse until the water runs clear.

**Culinary Uses:** Blackberries are good any way they are eaten and are a useful source of Vitamin C. During times of severe hardship, blackberries have replaced currants in buns and have even been used to sweeten cooked parsnips and beetroot. The first berries to ripen are the lowest ones, found right at the tip of the stalk. They are usually the juiciest and sweetest of all. A good way of serving the berries at this stage is to soak them overnight in red wine and then serve with cream the following day. The smaller berries further up the stalk tend to ripen much later and are rather 'seedy'. They should then be cooked with other fruit for best results. The root can be cooked. It should be neither too young nor too old and requires a lot of boiling. A tea is made from the dried leaves, the young leaves being the best. Young shoots - raw. They are harvested as they emerge through the ground in the spring, peeled and then eaten in salads.

**Other Uses:** In the past a black dye was prepared from the stem. Some people used the fruit for dyeing and the color navy blue was originally produced with blackberry juice.

**Recipes:**

**Blackberry Cordial**

2 pints ripe blackberries

1 pint white vinegar

1/2 lb honey

1 lb sugar

Mix the vinegar with the blackberries in an earthenware jar and allow to stand for a week, stirring daily. Strain the mixture through a jelly-bag overnight. Mix the liquid with the sugar and honey and bring to the boil. Allow to cool and pour the cordial into clean, dry bottles. Cork and store in a dark place. This syrup can be diluted with water for a refreshing drink, and is excellent for colds and sore throats. (Nature's Wild Harvest)

**Blackberry Cordial**

1 pint blackberry juice

1 lb sugar

1/2 oz cinnamon

¼ oz mace  
2 Tbsp cloves  
1 cup brandy

Mash warm blackberries to extract juice. Boil all except brandy together for 15 minutes; strain; and to each pint add 1 cup brandy (Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Mine)

### **Simple Blackberry Cordial**

2 cups crushed Blackberries  
3 cups brandy  
1 cup sugar or honey  
1/2 tsp. powdered Cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. fresh Orange zest  
1 tsp. fresh grated Ginger

Combined berries, Ginger, Orange zest, and Cinnamon with 2 cups brandy. Let macerate 2-3 weeks. Strain through cheese cloth, add sugar (or honey) and remaining brandy.

### **Blackberry Cobbler**

5 cups fresh blackberries  
1 cup sugar  
3 Tbsp flour  
2 Tbsp butter  
2 cups flour  
4 tsp baking powder  
½ tsp salt  
½ tsp cream of tartar  
2 Tbsp sugar  
½ cup butter  
2/3 cup milk (about)

Butter an oblong baking dish (8x10) and fill it almost to the rim with ripe blackberries sweetened with 1 cup of sugar. Sprinkle the 3 tablespoons flour over the sweetened berries and dot with butter. Set aside. Into a bowl, sift flour, baking powder, salt, cream of tartar and sugar. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse meal. With a fork, stir in enough milk to form a ball of dough (slightly less than 2/3 cup of milk). Turn out on a floured board and roll dough to ¼ inch thickness. Cover the blackberries with the dough and trim the edges; cut a vent in the top to allow steam to escape during baking. Sprinkle the top of the dough generously with additional sugar and bake in a hot oven (400F)

about 45 minutes, or until the crust is browned and the juice bubbling. Serve warm with rich cream. (The Wild Flavor)

### **Polenta Pudding with Fresh Blackberry Compote and Mascarpone Whipped Cream**

1 ½ cups sweet butter  
5 cups powdered sugar  
¼ vanilla bean, scraped inside  
4 eggs  
2 egg yolks  
2 cups bread flour  
1 cup polenta  
mint garnish

#### *Berry Compote*

4 cups fresh blackberries  
½ cup sugar  
¼ cup Petite Liqueur

#### *Mascarpone Whipped Cream*

½ cup mascarpone  
1 cup whipping cream  
3 tbsp sugar

In an electric mixer, beat the butter, sugar and vanilla bean until creamy. Beat in the eggs and egg yolks one at a time. Fold in flour and polenta. Pour into 12" greased and floured cake pan. Bake 1 hour. Unmold on a rack and let cool. Place cake in a larger size cake pan. Pour cooked berries and juices on top and around cake, cover and soak overnight. Cut cake into slices and garnish with mascarpone cream and a few fresh blackberries. Add a few drops of Petite Liqueur, a mint tip and some of the berry juices around the cake. Serve at room temperature. Berry Compote: Cook the blackberries, sugar and Petite Liqueur over low heat for 10 minutes. Reserve a few berries for garnish

#### *Mascarpone Whipped Cream*

In a mixing bowl, combine the mascarpone, whipping cream and sugar. Whip to a soft peak.

### **Minted Red Onion Blackberry Relish**

4 Tbsp olive oil  
8 cups thinly sliced red onions  
1 cup fresh or frozen blackberries  
2 tsp finely chopped fresh mint  
½ tsp finely ground black pepper

In olive oil, sauté onions over low heat until coated with oil. Cover pan and cook slowly, stirring frequently, until onions are soft and translucent. Add blackberries and cook, mashing them slightly until fruit is well blended. Add mint and black pepper and stir briefly to blend flavors. (The California Wine Country Herbs and Spices Cookbook)

### **Blackberry, Sloe Gin and Rosewater Muffins**

2 ½ cups plain unbleached flour  
generous ¼ cup light brown sugar  
4 tsp baking powder  
pinch of salt  
generous ½ cup chopped blanched almonds  
generous ½ cup fresh blackberries  
2 eggs  
7/8 cup milk  
4 Tbsp melted butter, plus a little more to grease cups, if using  
1 Tbsp sloe gin  
1 Tbsp rosewater

Mix the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a bowl and gently stir in the almonds and blackberries, mixing them well to coat with the flour mixture. Preheat the oven to 400F. In another bowl, mix the eggs with the milk, then gradually add the butter, sloe gin and rosewater. Make a well in the center of the bowl of dry ingredients and add the egg and milk mixture. Stir well. Spoon the mixture into greased muffin cups or tins. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until browned. Turn out the muffins on to a wire or until browned. Turn out the muffins on to a wire rack to cool. Serve with butter. (The Complete Book of Herbs)

### **Chicken Stew with Blackberries and Lemon Balm**

4 chicken breasts, partly boned  
salt and pepper  
scant 2 Tbsp butter  
1 Tbsp sunflower oil  
4 Tbsp flour  
2/3 cup red wine  
2/3 cup chicken stock  
grated rind of half an orange plus 1 Tbsp juice

3 sprigs lemon balm, finely chopped plus 1 sprig to garnish  
2/3 cup heavy cream  
1 egg yolk  
2/3 cup fresh blackberries plus 2/3 cup to garnish

Remove any skin from the chicken, and season the meat. Heat the butter and oil in a pan, fry the chicken to seal it, then transfer to a casserole dish. Stir the flour into the pan, then add wine and stock and bring to a boil. Add the orange rind and juice, and also the chopped lemon balm. Pour over the chicken. Preheat the oven to 350F. Cover the casserole and cook in the oven for about 40 minutes. Blend the cream with the egg yolk, add some of the liquid from the casserole and stir back into the dish with the blackberries (reserving those for the garnish). Cover and cook for another 10-15 minutes. Serve garnished with the rest of the blackberries and lemon balm. (The Complete Book of Herbs)

### **Hedgerow Jam**

1 lb crabapples  
1 lb elderberries  
1 lb blackberries  
¼ lb hawthorn berries  
½ lb sloes  
5 cups sugar  
2/3 cup honey  
1 cup shelled, chopped hazelnuts

Simmer the fruit in 7 ½ cups of water until soft. Stir in the sugar, honey and nuts. Simmer, stirring, until the sugar dissolves, then boil to setting point. Pour into warm jelly glasses and cover. (The Complete Book of Herbs and Spices)

### **Blackberry Mousse**

2 ½ cups blackberries  
½ cup sugar  
juice of 1 lemon  
4 Tbsp water  
3 tsp powdered gelatin  
2/3 cup cream  
2 egg whites

Wash the blackberries, drain and cook gently with the sugar and strained lemon juice

for about 5 minutes, until the berries are quite soft. Measure the water into a small bowl, sprinkle in the gelatin and set aside to soak for 5 minutes. Draw the pan of blackberries off the heat, add the soaked gelatin and stir until dissolved. Rub the fruit and juice through a fine sieve or food mill and discard the pips. Leave the puree until it is cold and just starting to set. Lightly whip the cream and fold into the blackberry puree. Then whisk the egg whites stiffly and fold them into the mixture with a metal spoon. Turn into a glass dish and chill until firm. Serve with sponge fingers or thin almond biscuits. (All Good Things Around Us)

### **Lemon Basil-Blackberry Soup with Basiled Nectarines**

#### *Basiled nectarines*

2 small nectarines, diced  
2 Tbsp granulated sugar  
1 ½ tsp minced basil leaves  
1 tsp fresh lemon juice

#### *Soup*

¾ cup water  
1/3 to ½ cup granulated sugar  
3 Tbsp (packed) whole lemon basil leaves  
2 cups blackberries  
½ cup buttermilk

#### Garnish

Whole lemon basil leaves

Prepare nectarines: in a small bowl, stir together nectarines, sugar, basil leaves, and lemon juice. Set aside, covered, to macerate while you prepare the soup. Make soup: in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, bring water, sugar, and lemon basil leaves to a boil; boil 1 minute. Cool (to cool quickly, submerge the saucepan to its rim in a larger bowl of ice water; stir frequently). Transfer to a blender or food processor. Add blackberries, and puree. Rub through a sieve to remove seeds. Whisk in buttermilk; chill, covered. To serve, put a small amount of nectarines in each serving bowl; pour soup around fruit. Garnish with lemon basil leaves. (Morning Glories)

### **Blackberry Thyme Crisp**

#### Filling:

1 quart fresh blackberries  
3 tbsp all-purpose flour  
2-3 tbsp cane sugar (use more if berries are more tart)  
4-5 sprigs thyme, leaves removed from stems  
juice from 1/2 lemon

#### Topping:

1/2 cup rolled oats  
  
3/8 cup all-purpose flour  
1/4 cup brown sugar  
1/2 stick butter, melted

Combine filling ingredients gently so as not to break up the berries, and put into small baking dish. Combine all topping ingredients, and cover the berries in the baking dish. Bake at 375 degrees F for 20-25 minutes, until the top is browned nicely and the filling is deliciously bubbly. Serve as is, or with a dollop of creme fraiche.

### **References:**

A Compendium of Herbal Magick, Paul Beyerl, Phoenix Publishing, 1998; ISBN: 0-919345-45-X  
All Good Things Around Us, Pamela Michael, Hot, Rinehart and Winston, 1980; ISBN: 0-03-057296-7  
The California Wine Country Herbs and Spices Cookbook, Virginia & Robert Hoffman, The Hoffman Press, 1998; ISBN: 0-9629927-7-1  
The Complete Book of Herbs, Andi Clevely and Katehrine Richmond, Smithmark, 1994; ISBN: 0-8317-1164-7  
The Complete Book of Herbs & Spices, Sarah Garland, Viking, 1979; ISBN: 0-671-05575-5  
A Druid's Herbal, Ellen Evert Hopman, Destiny Books, 1995; ISBN: 0-89281-501-9  
Dyeing the Natural Way, Frances E. Mustard, Greatlakes Living Press, 1977; ISBN: 0-915498-68-5  
Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants  
Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Mine, Susan A. McCreary, 11597 Strawberry Patchworks Book, 1991; ISBN: 0-9608428-5-3

HERBALPEDIA™ is brought to you by Herbalpedia LLC, PO Box 245, Silver Spring, PA 17575-0245; 717-393-3295; FAX: 717-393-9261; email: herbworld@aol.com URL: <http://www.herbalpedia.com>  
Editor: Maureen Rogers. Copyright 2014. All rights reserved.  
Material herein is derived from journals, textbooks, etc. THGMN cannot be held responsible for the validity of the information contained in any reference noted herein, for the misuse of information or any adverse effects by use of any stated material presented