

Sweet Potatoes, Peanuts, and Blackberries

I recently received several garden catalogs over the last few weeks in the mail. As I browsed through them, I found some interesting things. One is that there are several garden crops that could be raised here that are not. And that some plants prominently featured should not be.

Of all of the crops listed in the various catalogs, sweet potatoes, peanuts and some newer varieties of blackberries are some that can be reliably grown in Cache Valley. Depending on the variety, sweet potatoes and peanuts ripen in 90-130 days. Most inhabited areas of Cache County have between 120-150 contiguous frost free days during the growing season. However, both crops require warm soil to properly mature. A simple way to do this is to cover areas two to three weeks in advance with black plastic to warm the soil. Holes can be punched in the plastic to transplant. Once weather is consistently above 85 degrees, the plastic should be removed. After harvesting either crop from the ground, both need to be dried or cured so that they can be stored long term. USU has information on growing sweet potatoes available at: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/sweetpotato2006-10.pdf>.

Blackberries are not regularly grown in Cache County and other colder areas in Utah being cold-hardy to only 10 degrees below zero at best. Blackberries primarily produce fruit on wood produced the previous year. This fruit bearing wood is regularly damaged in even warmer areas of Cache County. A variety called 'Triple Crown' has quality fruit and is among the most cold-hardy and is commonly grown in Cache Valley. Another, called 'Chester', is even more cold tolerant but has smaller fruit lower in quality than many others. Recently two newer varieties, called 'Prime Jim' and 'Prime Jan', have been introduced. They have the ability to produce fruit on new growth and wood grown the previous year. Because blackberries readily regenerate from root-growth, even if these varieties are killed to the ground, you will get berry production. "Prime Jim" and "Prime Jan" both produce thorns and are primarily for homeowner use.

One fruit that is very coveted in Utah are blueberries. Unfortunately, blueberries are more difficult to manage than most other fruit due to them being intolerant of our alkaline soil. It is possible to manipulate our soil to grow them, but this requires several inputs and much time. Growing blueberries in Utah is for the serious gardener and those with lots of time. When all is said and done, it is probably less expensive and easier to purchase fresh blueberries from the store. However, for further information on growing blueberries in Utah, access the following fact sheet: http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture_Fruit_2009-01pr.pdf.

The Master Gardener training course will be starting the last week of January. This course offers in depth horticulture training to home gardeners and continues for approximately fourteen weeks. For further information please call 435-752-6263 or log on to www.extension.usu.edu/cache/horticulture to download a description sheet and application.