Blackberries are another great crop for Tennessee. All you have to do is pick them, for they grow wild on many farms. Briars, as we call them, can be a thorn in your side. And hands, and arms, and feet. But blackberries make up for the scratches with abundant fruit in July. I love free things, and this kept me from planting a blackberry patch for many years. We would simply forage for berries every summer, and can up 40 or 50 quarts. This involved getting up to the patch early in the morning, and ended with chiggers later on. I would bushhog paths through the briars, and thought I could semi-cultivate these wild patches.

It didn't work. The crop was always unpredictable. Good berries one year, and small, seedy ones the next year. They are dependant on timely rains, as the soils they grow wild on are generally poor and in need of humus. I decided to try another method.

I got a few Chester thornless blackberries and set them out, about five feet apart, in good soil. They jumped up and made big, long canes the first year. The next year those canes bore delicious fruit. So we built a trellis out of cedar, to tie up the one year old canes. I pruned out the canes that made fruit last year, they were dead. Blackberries bear on last years growth, which then dies, and send up new canes to bear the following year.

We set 150 out at Bell's Bend. Besides chester, we planted Triple Crown and Quachita. These are all thornless and make big plants. They could be set eight feet apart. The canes can be two inches in diameter and 15 feet long by the end of the year.

Blackberries are tip-layers, like black raspberries. The tips of the long, arching canes fall back on the ground and root. While we made the trellis, I dug up a few dozen new plants and now have a 100 foot row of them coming up. I guess I need another trellis.

In another spot I planted named, thorny blackberries. The University of Arkansas developed these erect, sweet-tasting blackberry varieties and named them after the Indian tribes Arapaho and Chickasaw. They taste like the very best of the wild ones, and are every bit as thorny. We used bamboo cane poles to trellis them. Although they stand up well, the weight of the fruit bends them low to the ground and I wanted them to be easier to pick.

Each plant can produce up to 20 pounds of berries. They are tolerant of different soil conditions. We supply liberal amounts of compost and mulch them with old, rotted wood chips. Disease and insects are not a problem. They bear best in full sun, but can take partial shade.

I don't know of an easier fruit to grow. They can't be beat for cobblers and pies. The plants make a nice hedge in the landscape. The thorny ones are sweeter, but the thornless varieties are sweeter to pick and prune.