

Spring fever is on the rise with bountiful buttercups blooming above the earth below begins to stir.

Seeds sprout and rosettes shoot up their flower stalks, and birds are making nests. I want to plant peas and lettuce, but am patiently waiting; the weather has not settled yet and last spring's freeze has not been forgotten.

So we planted a new raspberry patch instead. The old patch was set out 10 years ago, and really put out the fruit. But the last few years haven't been very productive, which I thought might be from the dry summers. Looking in an old farming book gave me another clue; they moved their raspberries to a new bed after eight years. It's time for a change.

I ran the subsoiler right down the row of raspberries a couple of times, and we lifted them out and into baskets. They were taken to the root cellar and sprinkled with water. Before planting I like to prune the roots a bit and take off the top. Small white shoots are visible and let me know they're ready and willing.

The new bed is nearby. But first a ton of compost gets spread over it, and then a layer of leaf mold. Now it's time to plow. After spading, holes are dug about 18" apart. That's twice as close as they need to be, but I have two times too many plants, and I'm in a hurry to have a thick patch. We'll see how it goes.

I'm a tromper when it comes to planting, especially perennials. I don't want any air pockets drying out the roots. So I do a little dance around the newly set plants and firm the soil upon them. The ground is moist and a rain is forecast, so we don't water.

One last job remains. More leaf mold is spread on top for a mulch. Raspberries love a leaf mulch, and will send their shoots up through it. The mulch holds in moisture, keeps the weeds down, and eventually turns into humus itself. Berries like the fungal-rich humus that comes from rotting forest products.

Heritage is the variety that we've been growing for about 20 years. This is the third time I've started a new patch, and I have high hopes. They are a fall bearing variety that is simply mown down and mulched after they finished fruiting. The canes sprout up in spring but don't bear fruit until August and September.

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I grew up with raspberries, and some of my first memories are picking the patches on the home place. Mom's raspberry jam was my favorite, although Judy's sure runs a close second. Our patch is a great joy for kids of any age. A handful of raspberries puts a smile on your face and tingle on your tongue.