

## Gaston Grower Spotlight- July 2022



It's July and the heat has set in across Gaston County. Early childhood memories of picking wild blackberries along the railroad tracks with my grandmother always come back to me this time of year. Picking berries was fun, even if my hands were all scratched up afterwards. What I didn't care for was the flavor, it was bitter and seedy. It took a whole lot of Maw Maw's magic (sugar) to make those berries worthy enough for a pie. Apparently, I wasn't the only one who thought that way, many cultivars have been bred to improve the quality of the wild blackberry.

Ethan Lineberger grows fresh blackberries for local market use at his two farm locations. He is participating in a variety trial currently in collaboration with NC State University to evaluate newer erect/semierect cultivars. Most of the cultivars on his farms are thornless which is a trait that is largely responsible for increasing commercial production of blackberries. You can even taste the progress in flavor in the newer cultivars on trial as opposed to [Natchez](#) which was a 2007 University of Arkansas cultivar. Natchez still has a little bite to its flavor (still tasty in my opinion). Natchez will remain a staple on Ethan's farm however due to how early the fruit ripens. Part of the puzzle for a grower like Ethan is selecting the best cultivars for flavor but also making sections that extend their season through July and into early August. [Von](#) an NC State cultivar has proven to be a workhorse on the farm, and [Ponca](#) shows promise thus far out of the trial cultivars. Growers that ship their product may choose to select a variety that has exceptional firmness and ships well. Blackberries are a crop that will continue to see improvement thanks to University plant breeding efforts.



NC State University and N.C. A&T State University work in tandem, along with federal, state and local governments, to form a strategic partnership called N.C. Cooperative Extension.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Gaston County Center, 1303 Dallas-Cherryville Hwy, Citizens Resource Center, Dallas, NC 28034