

Black raspberries in season at Arendtsville farm

By ERIN JAMES
Evening Sun Reporter
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Larry and Chris Swartz and their daughter, Jennifer, 6, stand amid the black raspberry bushes at the family's farm, Swartz Pumpkin Patch, in Arendtsville. Evening Sun Photo by James Robinson)
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Quality control at Swartz's Pumpkin Patch is handled by an expert.

With six years of experience at the farm, this berry picker/taster knows the tricks of the trade.

And she knows exactly when black raspberries are ready for picking on the Arendtsville family farm.

"When they're black," says a smiling Jennifer Swartz, the soon-to-be first-grader whose parents own the farm and grow the fruit.

Jennifer's getting to do a lot of picking lately, now that black raspberry season is "in full swing," according to her mom, Chris Swartz.

The season has just begun and will last only about two weeks.

Unlike the farm's disappointing strawberry season, Chris Swartz said black raspberries are fairing well this year.

"It looks pretty decent so far," she said.



Miriam Rebert, of Arendtsville, picks black raspberries at the farm Monday afternoon. The berries are in season for the next few weeks. Evening Sun Photo by James Robinson)
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Chris and her husband Larry own Swartz's Pumpkin Patch, a six-and-a-half-acre farm inside Arendtsville Borough where they grow and sell strawberries, black raspberries, tomatoes and pumpkins. The family has lived on the farm for about a decade.

Through "trial and error," Larry Swartz said the family figured out what fruits were still in demand within Adams County, a region at the heart of southcentral Pennsylvania fruit country.

"We just sort of narrowed the focus to see what's profitable," Larry Swartz said.

Strawberries and pumpkins are in demand every year, but the Swartz's say black raspberries are also a niche market they've been able to carve out for themselves.

In fact, black raspberries have become more popular during the past 10 years, Chris Swartz said.

"Now it seems more and more people are growing them for sale," she said.

Customers use the berries for a variety of reasons, including ice cream, jam, custard and pies. Others eat the seedy berries fresh.

And some pick their own black raspberries simply for the nostalgia or the experience of it, Chris Swartz said.

The couple said some customers travel from as far away as Maryland to pick



Miriam and Ernest Rebert of Arendtsville pick black raspberries at Swartz's Pumpkin Patch Monday afternoon. (Evening Sun Photo by James Robinson)

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black raspberries. Many customers are also from the area.

Although they do some advertising, Larry Swartz said he depends on repeat business from satisfied customers.

"A lot of it's by word of mouth," he said.

Up next for the Swartz family is tomato season.

Inside the farm's tomato plant greenhouse, Chris Swartz showed her daughter the only fruit that has so far changed to a pale orange.

"Pretty soon we'll have fresh BLTs," she said.

Contact Erin James at ejames@eveningsun.com.

IF YOU GO:

What: Swartz's Pumpkin Patch, an Arendtsville farm that is selling in-season black raspberries.

Where: 232 N. High St.

When: The pick-your-own farm is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Owners Larry and Chris Swartz suggest making reservations by calling (717) 677-0831.