

# Profile: Tasmanian Raspberry Canes, Carolyn & Simon Curtis

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Tasmanian Raspberry Canes, owned by Simon and Carolyn Curtis and situated at Wesley Vale in northwestern Tasmania, produces bare-rooted raspberry canes for retail, wholesale nurseries, and commercial growers.

Simon and Carolyn both have agricultural backgrounds. Simon studied horticulture at Ag College and later at TAFE. While actively involved in the raspberry cane business, Simon also runs a landscape construction business. Carolyn comes from a family farming background and together with Simon manages the raspberry cane business.

The Curtis' purchased the 45-hectare property eight years ago. Currently, they have 2.6 hectares of canes in production, producing approximately 110,000 canes each year. With plenty of land available, it allows for long crop rotation periods and room for expansion. As a result, growing in new ground produces healthy, strong, disease-free canes. Strict Biosecurity controls are in place to protect our disease-free status. The balance of the farm is used for cattle breeding and lucerne production.

The fertile sandy loam soil on the property is ideal for raspberry cane production not only to produce strong healthy canes, but the friable sandy soil also helps to minimise root damage during the harvest process.

The harvest begins in early winter, generally from mid-May until late June when the canes are dormant.

The canes are carefully lifted with a mechanical harvester, before being washed to remove all the soil. The washed canes are then taken to the packing shed to be graded and bundled into packs of ten. Customer orders are compiled and dug into aged compost prior to dispatch. During the grading process, the best quality canes are selected for customer orders, while the smaller canes and root pieces are utilised as growing stock and planted out for next season.

Water is sourced from a 50-megalitre farm dam, and the farm also has access to water from the Wesley Vale irrigation scheme if more water is required. Overhead irrigation is used to water the canes. Multiple applications of granular fertiliser are applied throughout the growing season. Simon is also experimenting with prescription foliar fertiliser blends for each variety to improve cane quality.

## Where are the canes sold?

Markets include Tasmania, Victoria, NSW, and Queensland.

## What varieties are available?

Varieties include many of the older raspberry varieties such as *Heritage*, *Lloyd George*, *Chilcotin*, *Chilliwack*, and *Autumn Bliss*. These varieties are popular with their customers because of their sweet taste, with many customers preferring to grow these for their flavour as opposed to long shelf life and appearance.

For customer sales enquiries and orders, the Curtis' have a website that also has information on varieties and a short story about their business. You can find it at [www.tasmanianraspberrycanes.com](http://www.tasmanianraspberrycanes.com)

As with most small businesses, cash flow is important particularly as it's a two-year process from planting to harvest. Rising costs are a big concern, particularly the cost of labour which accounts for 60 per cent of the cost of production. Rising costs have put a sharp focus on streamlining the harvest and grading process. They have also implemented improvements to the packing line to help reduce their cost of production.



**Customer orders are compiled and dug into aged compost prior to dispatch.** Photo credit: Carolyn Curtis



**Potted canes.** Photo credit: Mark Salter, FGT



**Simon and Carolyn Curtis.** Photo credit: Mark Salter, FGT

It was apparent on my visit that the welfare of their staff is important with each staff member valued. Carolyn explained that, in their experience, a harmonious workplace is more efficient. They also work with other producers in the area to provide ongoing employment for their crew where possible, so when work is finished on their farm there is the opportunity to find work nearby.

Although there are many challenges, both Simon and Carolyn are very positive and are looking to increase production and expand the business.

