



Unique Garden Centre

CURRANTS & GOOSEBERRIES

Currants are trusty old time favorites that are often forgotten in today's landscapes. Currants and the related Gooseberries are among the hardiest fruits for the prairies. They can be grown anywhere in western Canada. Although both currants and gooseberries are easy to grow, they produce abundantly with little care.

Prior to Planting

These long lived plants are heavy producers of fruit, and so the soil should be deeply dug and generous amounts of well rotted manure, compost or peat moss should be added. For best results the soil should be rich and well drained. While they require ample supplies of moisture, they will not do well in soggy soil. Neither can they stand dry, hot conditions, and will often do better in the shade of trees or on a north or northeast facing slope.

Planting

Plants should be spaced about 5 feet apart. If you are going to grow several plants, then plant in rows 7 to 9 feet apart. Set the plants slightly deeper than they were growing in the nursery (note the soil mark on the plant). Spread out the roots and cover them with soil. Firm the soil around the roots, being careful not to break off young shoots. Do not let the roots dry out during planting and water well after planting to settle the soil in around the roots. Prune branches to a length of 10 to 15 cm (4 to 6 inches) at planting time. This stimulates new growth. With fall planting, this pruning should be delayed until spring. Also, with fall planting, mulch around the plants to protect the roots.

Fall Care and Maintenance

Both currants and gooseberries are hardy for the prairies and usually do very well without any protection in the winter, but shelter from the prevailing winds will benefit them.

Pruning is important for continued health and fruit production. Pruning should be done in the spring before leaf development. Red and white currants produce most of their fruit on 2nd and 3rd year old wood, so all shoots 4 or more years old should be cut out along with any weak or damaged stems. For the average bush about 12 shoots is enough, divided into 3 to 5 shoots of each of 3rd year, 2nd year and 1st year wood. If vigorous, the number of shoots retained may be slightly increased. Black currants differ from the others in that the most and best fruit is produced on 1 year old wood with some good fruit produced on 2nd year old wood. Leave only 10 to 12 shoots per plant. Of these shoots, at least ½ should be one year old wood. All pruning should be done in early spring before new growth starts.

Picking

When picking fruit it is advisable to pick whole bunches rather than individual berries. Red and white currants in particular have thin skins and picking individual berries will result in torn berries and they will then crush very readily. Black currants are somewhat tougher. Currants will stay in good condition on the bushes for quite a long time allowing for a flexible picking schedule.

Pests & Diseases

Only three insects bother currants or gooseberries to any extent. These are the currant fruit fly, the currant aphid and spider mites.

The currant fruit fly is a rather small, yellowish fly whose larva over winters in the soil under the bush. These flies lay their eggs in the young fruit. Control by spraying when most of the blossoms (80%) have withered, and again 10 days later. Check with staff for recommended chemical. Spray particularly the undersides of the leaves in the centre of the bush. Spraying of the fruiting branches is not necessary but does no harm. Many of the berries that have had eggs laid in them will drop early, and these should be picked up and destroyed before the larvae leave the fruit, and enter the soil to pupate until the next spring.

Currant aphids are green in color which feed on the undersides of the leaves causing them to dimple and turn a dull red. Spray when the buds are beginning to open in the spring and again later as needed. With full developed leaves that have curled, spray the undersides very carefully for now the aphids are protected in the dimples and they are hard to reach.

Spider mites thrive in a dry environment. Keeping the plants properly watered discourages a major infestation. Spider mites are very hard to see with the untrained eye. Look for leaves with a speckled effect and tiny webbing on the undersides of the leaves (occasionally on the tops of leaves as well). Treat with an insecticidal soap and repeat if necessary.

Varieties

Red Currant (*Ribes* ‘Redlake’)

Strong vigorous bush with dense foliage. Abundance of red fruit is produced which is good for jelly and pies. Fruit ripens from June to August.

White Currant (*Ribes* ‘White Lake’)

A strong vigorous upright bush with abundant white, mild flavored berries. The fruit is good for pies and jellies. Ripening begins in June.

Black Currant (*Ribes nigrum*)

A fast growing shrub with best fruit production on one year old stems, with some fruiting on two year old wood. The black fruit is used for jams, jellies or pies. Fruit ripens from June to August.

Red Gooseberry – (*Ribes* ‘Hinnonmaeki Red’)

Large juicy red fruit is great for jam or pies and other desserts. Greenish white flowers adorn this small shrub in spring. Berries ripen in early July. Fruit has a delicate sweet flavour with a hint of an apricot taste.

Yellow Gooseberry (*Ribes* ‘Hinnonmaeki Yellow’)

Large juicy yellow fruit for jam or pies. Ripens in early July. Fruit has a delicate sweet flavour with a hint of an apricot taste. Greenish white flowers in spring.

Pixwell Gooseberry (*Ribes hirtellum* ‘Pixwell’)

This is a very productive selection making it favorable for jelly and wine. It will produce fruit in its second year. White flowers in spring are followed by pale greenish pink berries in July. It is also a valuable landscape plant that adds to fall displays with foliage that turns to a brilliant burgundy colour. Well suited for the shady garden.

