AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Growing Currants and Gooseberries

HORTICULTURE
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Currants and gooseberries are very cold-hardy and can be grown almost anywhere in Minnesota. They grow best in areas where summer temperatures are relatively low and moisture is plentiful.

Both currants and gooseberries are well suited to the home fruit garden. They bear some fruit the second and third years and a full crop the fourth year after planting. Three or four currant and gooseberry plants will produce enough fruit for the average family.

ESTABLISHING THE PLANTING

Type of Soil

Currants and gooseberries grow on almost any soil type but do best on soils that are cool and moist, with good air and moisture drainage, and on heavy soils that are high in organic matter. Avoid planting on light sandy soils, which tend to become hot and dry during the summer, or where water stands at any time of the year.

When to Plant

Plant in early spring. Apply 1 bushel of well-rotted manure per plant before planting and work it into a soil that has been thoroughly prepared. Be sure that quackgrass and other troublesome perennial weeds are completely controlled. Space the plants about 5 feet apart in rows 6 to 8 feet apart.

Set the plants about an inch deeper than they were in the nursery. This causes new shoots to rise from below the soil level forming a bush rather than a single stem. Firm the soil around the roots and water if the soil is dry. Remove all but four or five canes; cut these back to about one-third of their original length.

Care of Planting

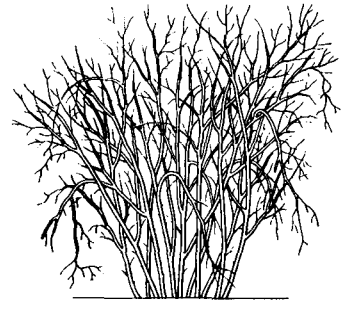
Control weeds thoroughly by hoeing and cultivating. Avoid deep cultivation that may injure the roots. If cultivation is not practiced or advisable, a mulch of straw or hay can be used. The mulch should be deep enough to smother weeds (about 6 inches). Additional mulching material should be added each season to maintain proper depth.

Fertilization

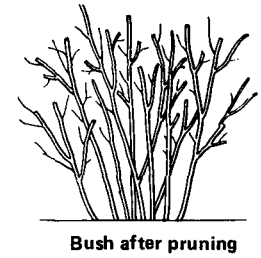
Fertilize the plants each spring, using a cupful per plant of a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10. Spread the fertilizer under the branches and a foot or so beyond.

Pruning

Pruning currants and gooseberries is not difficult. After the fourth year, remove all 4-year-old stems. Stems 3 years old or younger produce the best fruit. Removing these old stems stimulates vigorous young shoots at the base. If too many young shoots develop, thin them out. About 12 stems from the base is about right for a mature bush. Prune early in the spring before growth starts.



Bush before pruning



Bush after pruning

Insects and Diseases

Comparatively few insects and diseases affect currants and gooseberries. These can be readily controlled by clean cultivation, pruning, and if necessary, spraying. See *Home Fruit Spray Guide,* Extension Folder 375, for up-to-date pest control practices.

Leaf spot diseases are quite common. The spots are small and circular with gray centers. If these spots become numerous, the result is premature defoliation of bushes. Strict sanitation to destroy infected leaves may help to check this disease.

Powdery mildew is common and covers the leaves with a white moldy growth that results in distortions of leaves and stem tips. You can best control this disease by following the recommended spray schedule.

White pine blister rust shows up on currants and gooseberries as rust patches on the undersurface of leaves. Spots are covered with hairlike projections that hang down.

Currant worm feeds on the leaves and often strips all the leaves from the plant before the damage is noticed. You can control this worm by spraying with an all-purpose fruit spray.

Currant aphid sucks juice from the undersurface of leaves, causing reddish discoloration and crinkling. An application of malathion when the leaves are ½-inch long controls this insect.

Harvesting

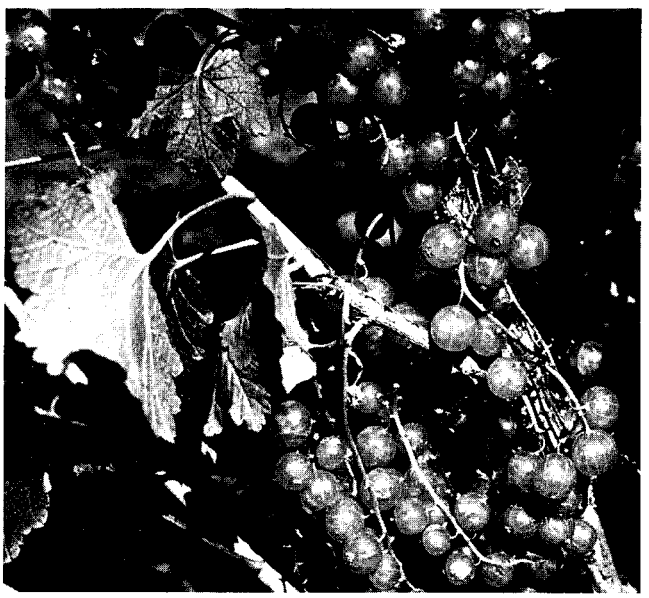
Currants and gooseberries begin bearing when about 3 years old and have a productive life of 10 to 15 years. Three to four quarts per mature bush is considered a good yield under good cultural practices in the home garden. The ripening period is during July.

VARIETIES OF CURRANTS AND GOOSEBERRIES

Currants and gooseberries are used mainly in making jellies, jams, preserves, and pies. The three varieties described below are recommended for all areas of Minnesota.

Red Currant

Red Lake originated at the University of Minnesota Horticultural Research Center near Excelsior. Clusters are above medium size and compact. Berries are very large and dark red, with a pleasant mild flavor and good quality. Ripening period ranges from early to midseason. Bushes are nearly erect, moderately vigorous, and very productive.



Gooseberries

Pixwell originated in North Dakota. Berries are of medium size, light red when ripe, and of fairly good quality. Long stems make picking easy. Bushes are moderately vigorous and very productive.

Welcome also originated at the University of Minnesota Horticultural Research Center. Berries are medium large and of good quality, ripening very early. The flavor is mildly tart. Color is light but dull red. Bushes are vigorous, medium upright, becoming spreading; spines are sparse, very short, weakly attached, and missing from older wood.

▲ **Welcome—a good quality gooseberry**

◀ **Red Lake—a popular red currant**

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