

JUST FRUIT:

Red, White, & Black Currant



CURRENT

RIBES RUBRUM, R. PETRAEUM, R. NIGRUM

RECOMMENDED CULTIVAR - RED
LAKE, WHITE IMPERIAL, AND
TITIANA

Ecology



Member of the
Saxifrage Family

Hardy to Zone 3

Mature height 4 - 6 'Sun/shade - Prefers
partial shade. Plant spacing - 3 - 5' in
row spacing.

Deciduous, fast growing shrub, with
shallow roots. Most cultivated currants are
of European origin, though there are many
native North American species. Leaves
alternate, single, lobed and maple-like.
Blossoms have a clove - like fragrance.
Currants serve both an insectory and
culinary function in the orchard ecosystem.

Primary pollinator

Self-fruitful, (except for a few black
currants) cross-pollination by a second
cultivar is not needed. Bumblebees,
solitary bees, and hoverflies are effective
pollinators working in sync with currant's
early bloom when weather is colder and
honeybees are not as active.

Fruit

Currant fruit color types include red,
white, pink, and black. which ripen in early
July. Small pea-sized fruit produced and
harvested in pendulous chain of berries
called "strigs". Hand harvesting remains the
most economic method for harvest. Fruits
high in antioxidants and phenols.

Soil Conditions

Prefer a rich, moist, well-drained soils;
however will tolerate a wide range of soil
types. The ideal soil pH for currants is 6.7 -
7.0.

WHY GROW CURRANTS?

While not the easiest to grow, currants
are the crown jewels of the fruit world,
glistening, translucent bunches of fruit -
illuminated by the sun - produce sweet
tart 'champagne' fruits that can't be beat
for jellies, jams, and juices. Currants are
winter hardy, and will grow in most
climatic zones. An added bonus is that
they can be grown in areas that may be
too wet and shady for other fruit.
Currants favor morning sun, afternoon
part-shade and buoyant air circulation.
They can be grown along the drip-line of
your apple, pear, or quince trees as well as
on the north side of buildings. The leaves
sunburn readily and the plants collapse
quickly when the soil or air temperature
exceeds 85° F.



Under ideal conditions currants grow
quickly, reaching a height of 5 - 6 feet, and
can produce 10 - 12 lbs. of berries per
bush. Majority of fruit is produced on 2 -
3 yr. shoots, so proper pruning is key to
success. Red currants (*Ribes sativum*) have
beautiful red, tart berries growing in
grape-like clusters. The white currant is a
sport of the red, and has translucent

berries with a delicate flavor. Minimal pest
issues and foliar diseases (leaf spot,
anthracnose, and mildew) can be
addressed by ensuring plant spacing,
pruning in fall of second and third year
canes, and good air flow. Finding a few
rust and powdery mildew resistance
cultivars such as Titiana (the Norse queen
of strength and heartiness), will go a long
way in ensuring a steady supply of fruit
alongside plant vigor. Cultural
requirements for red and black currants
are similar, though black currants can
tolerate more standing water than red
currants. In addition to cultivar and site
selection, management needs include;
proper pruning, bird netting (optional),
side dress of compost or thick woodchip
mulch. Deer browse is not an issue.
Economic potential - medium input, first
harvest in 1 - 2 yrs.
Fresh marketed fruit
can have returns of ~
\$8,000/acre, on a
smaller scale growers
can get an average of
\$5.00/pint and ~ \$8-
\$10/lb at markets.





Currants - Social Benefits, Tastes, Potential Uses

The current state of currant culture in the U.S. confounds the aspiring orchardist; while European currants, introduced into America, with early settlers, enjoyed considerable popularity both for their medicinal and culinary merits for hundreds of years, the horticultural tide (and perhaps the forest products industry) turned against them in the early 20th century and they were unjustly accused of spreading white pine blister rust and a federal ban was placed on the import and culture of Ribes species. Eventually discoveries concluded that currants were an equal victim to white pine blister rust as they do not spread the disease, but rather serve as hosts. The federal ban was lifted in 1966, but the impact has lingered and currants are slowly gaining ground as an important fruit crop for the organic orchard.

This agricultural maelstrom poses a thorny dilemma - to recommend or not recommend currants for cultivation? Current events and findings reveal however, that currants offer a well balanced mineral and vitamin content alongside a high nutraceutical content. Black currants offer twice the antioxidant of blueberries, four times the vitamin C of oranges and twice the potassium of bananas. Black currant seed oil is also rich in many nutrients especially vitamin E as well as omega's 3 & 6 fatty acid. Black currant was used for centuries in Chinese folk medicine as a diuretic, diaphoretic, and as an ingredient in nutraceuticals, wines, juices, and jams. Currants were also used as a flavoring and coloring agent (100 parts red currants, 10 parts red cherries, and 5 parts black currants).

Scottish lore held that good fortune would surely follow if, after the wedding ceremony, in an apparently ancient show of 'tough love,' the mother of the bride met her at the door and broke a currant bun over her head.



'Holy black currant root wad'. First year shrub roots emerging from a 2 hr. soak in compost tea before being planted at Hilltop Community Farm. Photo by Rob McClure



While some enjoy eating currants fresh, these fruit are especially prized for use in making jellies, jams, pies, and sauces. For fresh eating let the berries hang for about three weeks after they color up. To avoid damaging the fruits, pick a whole strig by its stem, taking care not to damage the spur. Currants enjoy a cosmopolitan culinary status revered by many global kitchens. Currants have been used for wine, said by some to be similar in flavor to Graves or Rhine wines. Black currants have a nutty, clove-like taste and are the traditional source of the French liqueur, Cassis. Currants also work well, infused with vodka or fermented for cordial. In France, the rarefied, Bar-le-duc or Lorraine jelly is traditionally made from white currants. In Scandinavia, currants are used in fruit soups and summer puddings, and used in combination with custard or meringue. In Germany, the syrup derived from red currant is added to soda water for a refreshing drink.

- RECIPE SAMPLER -

Yemeni Eggplant

1 eggplant; 1 tsp salt; 1/4 C plus 2 TBSP olive oil; 2 onions, finely chopped; 1 1/2 lbs tomatoes coarsely chopped; 1 1/2 tsp each allspice and cumin; pinch of cayenne pepper; 5 garlic cloves, minced; 1/4 Cup currants; 3 TBSP each chopped fresh mint and cilantro; salt, pepper to taste. Cut eggplant into 3/4 in cubes, place in strainer and sprinkle with salt, drain about 30 minutes. Heat

Salad with Currant

oil in pan and saute onions. Add tomatoes and spices cooking until golden. Add garlic and currants, stir and transfer to bowl. Add TBSP oil to pan and cook eggplant. Add to tomato mixture, add herbs, season with salt and pepper. Cover and chill. Best if made a day in advance. *From the*

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