

Growing Currants and Gooseberries

Currants and gooseberries are shrubby bush fruits that do very well in most parts of the Pacific Northwest. They are tolerant of many soil types, and thrive in sun or partial shade.

Site Selection and Planting

While currants and gooseberries are tolerant of many soil types, they prefer well-drained organic rich soils. The best fruiting will be in full sun sites, but they will also fruit in partial shade. Space the plants 5 feet apart, and apply a layer of mulch to conserve moisture in the summer.

Pruning and Training

Most currants and gooseberries are grown as freestanding, multistemmed bushes. They can also be trained as standards (small bushes on a short trunk), or fan trained against a fence or wall. The goal in pruning gooseberries and currants is to develop an open, vase shaped bush with even spaced branches. Thinning cuts, removing older branches back to the base, are preferred.

Disease and Insect Problems

There are three main insect pests that trouble gooseberries and currants in the Pacific Northwest climate.

- The gooseberry maggot, also known as currant fruit fly can make the fruit unusable. The adult fly emerges from the soil in April, and lays eggs on the forming fruit. The resulting maggots feed within the berries. Applying foliar insecticides when the adult flies are first noted is the one control. Covering the bushes with floating row covers keeps the flies from reaching the fruit. Placing tarps on the ground around the bushes prevents the larvae from entering the soil to pupate.
- The imported currant worm is a sawfly larvae that can defoliate a bush in a matter of days. The ½" long larvae are small, blackspotted green worms with black heads. Using a foliar insecticide when they first appear can control their populations. Handpicking small populations is also a good control. Floating row covers can also prevent the flies from reaching the foliage.
- Aphids feed on the undersides of the leaves, causing them to crinkle, and often leads to a blistered look to the foliage. Control by washing off with strong jets of water, or spraying insecticidal soap.

Diseases are uncommon but possible. Choosing your planting site carefully helps prevent the bushes from being stressed and subject to problems.

- One of the main diseases of currants and gooseberries is powdery mildew. Make sure your planting site has good air circulation. Keep the bushes pruned to encourage air circulation. The best control is to plant resistant varieties.
- All *Ribes* are potentially alternate hosts for white pine blister rust. Currants and gooseberries should not be planted where 5 needled pines are planted unless they are resistant to rust.

