

630.71  
Or3c1  
no.766  
c.3

OREGON STATE LIBRARY  
Document

*Gooseberry*  
and  
 *Currant Culture*

Document  
Collection  
Oregon  
Collection

FEB 4 1972



Extension Circular 766

January 1972

Cooperative Extension Service  
Oregon State University, Corvallis



# *Gooseberry and Currant Culture*

*Revised by Lloyd W. Martin, R. Garren Jr., and  
D. L. Rasmussen,  
Superintendent, North Willamette Experiment  
Station, Extension Horticulturist, OSU, and  
Marion County Extension Agent, respectively*

Gooseberries and red currants are two of the hardiest bush fruits grown in Oregon. Properly conditioned they will withstand quite low temperatures. The plants are relatively easy to grow either in commercial or home garden plantings. Their culture is similar.

## **Soil and site**

Red currants and gooseberries grow best on fertile, well-drained silt or clay loam soils of fair depth. Lighter soils should be well supplied with organic matter. Ample moisture is necessary, but neither crop will tolerate waterlogged conditions or saline water.

Select a site with good air drainage. Red currants and gooseberries bloom quite early in the spring. Good air drainage is partial insurance against early spring frost injury. Air drainage also lessens injury from powdery mildew, a common problem with these plants. Wind-swept situations are not suitable and are to be avoided. Northern or northeastern slopes or exposures are often more cool and moist and protected somewhat from the direct rays of the sun. This will aid in preventing sun scald to the fruit. For home plantings, areas partially shaded from the sun make a good site.

## **Propagation of plants**

Plants of recommended varieties can usually be obtained from nurserymen within the state. If a grower wishes to propagate plants, this can be done quite easily.

Gooseberries are propagated by mound layerage or cuttings. European gooseberry varieties are usually propagated by mound layerage and American varieties, such as the Oregon Champion, by cuttings.

In layering, stock plants are cut back near the ground before growth starts in the spring. By mid-summer, new shoots should be covered halfway to the tips with soil. By early fall, most of these covered shoots will have rooted if adequate moisture is supplied. In late winter, the rooted layers can be cut off and lined out in nursery rows. After one year of growth, they are ready for digging and use.

Cuttings are used for propagating red currants and American varieties of gooseberries. Healthy, mature wood, 8-12 inches long, of one season's growth is used. Cuttings are taken in January or early February. They are usually callused before being lined out in nursery rows in the spring. This is done by storing the cuttings in moist sand, sawdust, or peat moss in a cool place where the tops will remain dormant. Rooted cuttings are usually dug after one year in the nursery rows.

## **Handling planting stock**

Gooseberries and red currants are usually planted in the early spring in Oregon prior to leafing out and as soon as the soil can be worked. In the mild valley climates, they can also be set in the fall if plants are available.

Bundled nursery plants should be opened upon arrival. If roots are dry, they should be soaked in water before further handling. Damaged or broken plant parts should be removed. If plants have not already been pruned back, the tops should be cut to stand 6 to 10 inches above the ground. Planting should proceed without further delay. When conditions are unfavorable for planting, the plants should be heeled in a sheltered trench along the north side of a building or other cool protected area. A good time to plant is in early October or early March. One year old plants are preferred.

Rows are spaced according to the type of equipment that is to be used for cultivation and harvest. Row spacing will usually vary from 6 to 8 feet. Plants are spaced 4 to 6 feet apart within the row, depending on the variety and the soil fertility.

If the soil is easily worked, the hole for planting can be made by forcing a spade straight down and then pressing it forward. The roots are placed

in the hole, the spade withdrawn, and the soil firmed about the roots. For large plantings, growers often prepare for planting in trenches by using power trenching equipment. Plants are set so the lowest branches start just below the soil surface. Pack the soil firmly about the root as the plants are set.

## **Soil management**

Gooseberries and red currants should be planted in soils previously made free of noxious weeds. Cultivations may begin soon after plants are set. Both currants and gooseberries are shallow rooted and, after the first year, cultivation should be shallow to avoid root damage.

Mulching is a recommended soil management practice, especially in home garden plantings. A 3- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch or a layer of black plastic film is very effective in conserving moisture, controlling weed growth, and keeping the soil cool in summer heat. Plastic may be held in place by soil, sawdust, wood chips, or other mulching material.

Although weeds are effectively controlled through the use of selective herbicides, home gardeners are wise to use other methods. Commercial growers should check with their nearest extension agent for the latest chemical weed control recommendations.

## **Maintaining fertility**

Red currant and gooseberry respond readily to fertilizers. The physical condition of the soil and its inherent fertility will regulate the amount and kind of fertilizer to be used. Liberal applications of stable manure free from weed seeds are recommended. Complete chemical fertilizers such as 10-20-20 are used at rates of 300 to 500 pounds per acre. For the home gardener, this is equivalent to 2 cups of dry fertilizer material to 100 square feet of soil surface. Fall or late winter applications are recommended. Excessive or repeated usage of fertilizer high in chloride or other salts is not recommended because of the salt sensitivity of these plants.

## Pruning

Plants should be pruned when dormant. Weak, damaged, or diseased parts should be removed first. Red currant bushes one year old should be pruned to leave six or eight strong shoots. At the end of the second year, leave four or five of the two-year-old shoots and three or four one-year-old shoots. At the end of the third year, leave three shoots each of the one-, two- and three-year-old wood. After 3 years, prune to remove the oldest wood to allow replacement with new shoots. Varieties that tend to spread and droop should have the outer growth removed to keep fruit off the ground. Centers of bushes should be kept open by removing crowded and interfering branches.

Red currant fruit is borne at the base of one-year-old wood and on spurs on older wood. The spurs on two- and three-year-old wood produce best.

Fruit of the gooseberry is produced on one-year-old wood and one-year-old spurs of older wood. Spurs on three-year-old wood are most productive in Oregon. Wood older than three years is removed.

In general, gooseberries are pruned much the same as currants. If side shoots become too numerous, enough of them are removed to form a fairly open head.

## Harvesting the crop

Red currants and gooseberries can be left on the bushes for several weeks; however, berries become less tart as they ripen. Currants used for jelly are picked slightly underripe, but for other purposes fruit is allowed to become fully ripe. Gooseberries are picked when full-sized, but slightly underripe. Berries picked prior to maturity are higher in pectin and retain more of the tart flavor.

Berries for the fresh market must be picked carefully to avoid crushing the currants and bruising or scratching the gooseberries. Currants are picked by grasping the stems above the berry cluster. The berries easily crush and should not be pressed in picking. Gooseberries are picked separately for the fresh market. For processing, they are stripped off by hand. Hard-faced gloves and pick-

ing aprons are provided for this purpose. Occasionally, if the size of the planting warrants their use, mechanical pickers and semi-mechanical harvest aids are used. Hand stripping and mechanical aids mix leaves with fruit and removal by air is necessary. Picked fruit should not be left exposed to the sun because of sensitivity to sun scald.

Yields of three to five tons per acre are achieved with both currants and gooseberries when well cared for.

## Varieties

All varieties of gooseberries and currants are alternate hosts to the white pine blister rust, a serious disease of the five-needle pines. It is for this reason that Oregon has designated certain control areas. Regulations for these areas prohibit growth and entry of plants, cuttings, and seeds of gooseberries and currants. Restrictions apply to red and black currants and English gooseberries. In other areas there is no quarantine, but caution should be observed in home garden areas where susceptible ornamentals may be present. Black currants and English gooseberries are subject to diseases, including mildew and rust, and are not recommended. Check with your Extension agent for current quarantine restrictions.

Recommended varieties are as follows:

### RED CURRANTS

*Perfection*—Large, crimson, subacid, mid-season, compact clusters—more susceptible to mildew than Red Lake or Wilder.

*Red Lake*—Large, light red, subacid, late, long clusters, very hardy.

*Wilder*—Large, dark red, subacid, mid-season, large compact cluster, hardy—currently the major processing variety in the Willamette Valley.

### GOOSEBERRIES

*Oregon Champion*—Large, green, late, productive, susceptible to mildew—best northwest variety for processing.

*Pixwell*—Good variety for home gardens, mildew resistant, vigorous, very productive, pink colored fruit, few thorns, easy to pick.

## Pest control

Both crops have insect and disease problems which include powdery mildew and gooseberry maggots. Leafspot disease is a common problem in gooseberries and stem borers are a problem in red currants.

Control recommendations may change from year to year. Growers should check with their local extension offices for pest control information.

## Use pesticides safely

Use only recommended pesticides at approved rates. Observe the time limitations on use of pesticides to avoid illegal residues at harvest.

Avoid exposure to hazardous chemicals by wearing an approved mask, gloves, and a liquid repellent clothing. Store pesticides out of reach of children. *Read the label!*



---

Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Lee Kolmer, director. Oregon State University and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Printed and distributed in furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

---