

Wild Currant

(Ribes species)



Where does it grow? Currant bushes are found in moist shaded places and they grow on dry open slopes and ridges throughout Eastern Oregon. There are quite a number of different species and they grade into the gooseberry group. The more common currants will be described here. They live in the same districts as chokecherries, wild roses, bitterbrush, and service berries. Sometimes currants will associate with aspen or pine trees. Bushes are usually solitary. Big patches of currants are uncommon.

Is it important? Birds eat the berries, deer and elk use some of the twigs for winter forage. The leaves sometimes are eaten by sheep and deer, but are avoided if other feed is plentiful. Currant bushes are low-growing and so are easy to graze. Berries of some species are used to make jams and jellies, but some varieties are unpleasant to the taste.

What does it look like? Currant grows as a bush low enough for a man to look over the top. It is usually unarmed (without thorns) and has numerous small leaves. When ripe, the berries are brightly colored. Leaves are roundish with toothed margins. Some species have deeply indented margins. Flowers are mostly in clusters and in some species the calyx is tubular. The berries come free of the stem when picked and will fall to the ground as they become over-ripe.

Description

Length of life--Many years because of hardy growth.

Flowers--White, yellow, greenish, pinkish or red, short-stalked, growing usually in clusters.

Wild currant occurs all over Eastern Oregon, with many different varieties. The one pictured is Ribes cereum, wax currant. Note the tubular appearance of the flower and the rounded leaves with irregular margins (1x)..



Flower (2x)

Berry (1x)

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Leaves--Tend to be clustered at ends of short, spur-like twigs. They are rounded or kidney-shaped and slightly ruffled.

Berries--About one-fourth of an inch in diameter. Can be colored red, black, or golden, depending upon variety.

Does it look like anything else? Gooseberry plants and currants grade into each other botanically and are considered as one group by botanists. For the purposes of these leaflets, we have considered them as separate plants. The short stem hangs onto the gooseberry fruits, so the currants can be picked clear and free of stems. Most of the gooseberries are thorny and most of the currants are thornless. The fruits of the currants are mostly in clusters, while the gooseberries may be single or in small clusters. Both currants and gooseberries harbor a fungus called white pine blister rust. Some districts with Sugar pine and/or White pine timber (five needles) are trying to eradicate these shrubs to protect the timber.