

CURRANT & GOOSEBERRIES

CURRANTS AND GOOSEBERRIES

In The Home Garden

Horticultural Branch, B.C. Ministry of Agriculture

Bush fruits (currants and gooseberries) are currently enjoying a revival. They are excellent for cooking, jams, jellies and wine making. Because the bushes are very hardy, they can be grown over a wide range of climatic conditions.

Locations. Currants and gooseberry bushes will do well in most garden soils. However, they bloom very early in the spring and are thus susceptible to late spring frost injury - avoid planting in low lying "frost pockets." Either partially shaded or direct sunny locations are acceptable. Good air circulation can be of assistance in controlling some diseases.

Soils. Although they will grow well under a wide range of conditions, they prefer well drained silt or clay loams. Bush fruits are heavy feeders so liberal amounts of fertilizer or compost should be worked into the soil prior to planting.

In the coastal areas, where the soil tends to be very acid or "sour", an annual application of lime is advised.

Propagation. Red and black currants and American type gooseberries are readily propagated by either cuttings or layering.

Cuttings are made from the dormant one year old wood, usually at pruning time in the late winter or early spring. Select strong, healthy shoots about 6-10 inches in length. The bottom is cut square across just below a bud, while the top is cut at least one inch above the top bud. The cuttings are set in the ground about 4 inches deep and at least 6 inches apart. Allow the top 2-3 buds to develop and rub the others off the cutting so as to produce a small trunk. After one season in the nursery row, the young plants are usually ready to be moved to the desired location.

Layering can be started at any time in the growing season, but is best if done in the spring before pruning. Low growing branches are anchored at the soil level and partially covered with a mound of earth. Once the branches are well rooted, they can be cut off and transplanted. This layering process usually requires a full year to complete. However, the European type of gooseberry may take two years to root successfully.

Planting Distances. In the home garden, a minimum spacing of 5 feet is recommended for red currants and gooseberries, while 6-7 feet is suggested for black currants. However, slightly wider spacings may be preferred for ease of picking.

Mulching. A thick mulch of old sawdust, grass clippings, compost, spent mushroom compost or manure is desirable. It conserves soil moisture and helps control weed growth. A layer of black plastic may also be used, but may interfere with fertilizing in the spring.

Fertilizing. The bushes must be strong and vigorous to produce top yields of large berries. It is, therefore, important to feed the bushes each spring with manures and/or fertilizers.

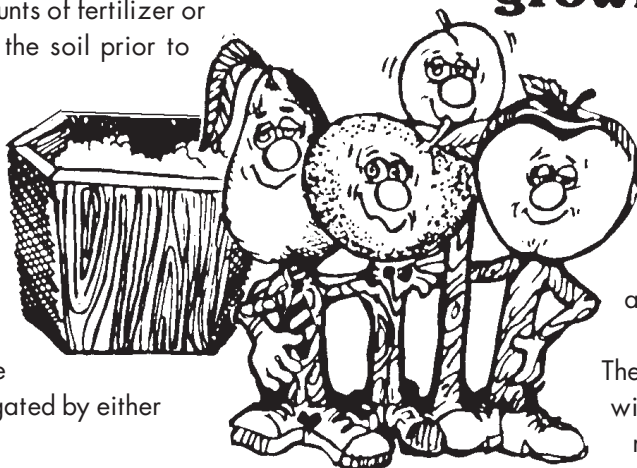
The actual rate of commercial fertilizer used will depend upon the soil type, amount of manure used, availability, etc.

However, a guide would be to use

2-3 cupfuls of 6-8-6 per mature bush per year. Apply the fertilizer in a ring under the branches and work it into the surface soil. In future years, adjust the rate upwards or downwards as necessary.

Pruning. Proper pruning is essential for good crops of fruit. It is carried out in the late winter or early spring before growth starts. Select only the strong, upright growing canes.

Let's get
growin'



Black currants produce the best fruit on one year old wood, therefore, each spring all old wood and weak canes are removed leaving 6-9 strong canes.

Gooseberries and red currants produce fruit on spurs on 2 and 3 year old wood. Therefore, wood older than 3 years of age should be removed. Each year, 2-4 good strong new canes should be retained; however, it is seldom desirable to keep more than a total of 8 or 9 canes per bush. Any long new canes can be shortened to promote side branching and fruit spur development.

Yields. Currants and gooseberries vary considerably in yield, depending upon soil, location, care and season. The European gooseberries are less prolific than the American varieties. A reasonably average yield for all types (gooseberries and currants) would be 4 or 5 pounds per bush although yields of up to 7 or 8 pounds are possible.

Varieties. Varieties respond differently to different growing conditions so that it is impossible to recommend one variety for all locations. The number of varieties available are too numerous to mention. However, the following varieties are generally considered to be some of the best available to B.C. gardeners:
Black Currants - Amos Black, Baldwin, Boscoop Giant, Cotswold Cross and Mendip Cross.

Red Currants - Perfection, Red Cross, Red Lake and Stephen's No. 9.

White Currants - White Grape, White Imperial.

American Gooseberries - Chief, Oregon, Champion and Pixwell.

European Gooseberries - Achilles, Early Sulphur, Whinham's Industry and White Smith.

Insects and Diseases. There are two main pests that attack currants and gooseberries - the Currant Fruit Fly (small white maggots in the fruit) and Powdery Mildew (whitish, powdery fungus growth on the leaves and fruit, especially severe on European varieties of gooseberries). The fruit fly can be controlled by annual sprays immediately after flowering while mildew control sprays should be applied during the growing season, as required. For specific control recommendations on these and other pests, consult your nearest Agricultural office or the bulletin Pest Control for the Home Gardener.

Prepared by: W.S. Peters

Horticulturist

B.C. Ministry of Agriculture

Abbotsford



QUALITY
PRODUCTS
FOR A
QUALITY
GARDEN



WE'RE IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD



RECYCLED PAPER