

Currants and gooseberries weather Wyoming's harsh winters and can sweeten summers

Currant and gooseberries are well-suited for Wyoming's climate and may be a good option if you would like to grow fruit on your property. These perennial shrubs are in the *Ribes* genus and provide growers with a fair number of cultivar options. While there are many native species of *Ribes* in Wyoming, the common cultivars have been developed from species native to Europe. Berries can be used for fresh eating, cooking, and preserving.

Growing conditions

Most currant and gooseberry cultivars are USDA cold hardiness zone 3 or 4, which makes them ideal for Wyoming. Unlike many fruit plants, which do not grow well in shady areas, currant and gooseberry cultivars are adaptable and can be grown in partial shade. Plants grown in full sun tend to produce more, bigger fruit. Since plants bloom very early in the season, those in areas at high elevation or low-lying areas might consider planting on the north side of buildings to delay the blooming of plants, which helps avoid

damage to blossoms from frost. Adding several inches (two to four) of mulch at the base of plants is useful for reducing competition from weeds and grass, helping maintain moisture for plant roots and reducing injury from mowers and weed eaters.

Production

Plants bloom early in the spring and produce fruit from the middle of July to early August. Most currants will produce fruit in a 1- to 2-week window, while gooseberries produce over a longer 3- to 4-week period. Well-drained soils that remain cool through the growing season and have adequate moisture are best. Plants can grow both in slightly acidic and in alkaline soils. Incorporating organic matter into the soil before planting can be useful. Also consider adding a moderate level of fertilizer or organic matter around plants once they have established; however, currants and gooseberries have moderate nutrient needs so do not over-

fertilize. Currants and gooseberries will produce fruit after two years and usually take three to five years to reach a mature size. Mature currant plants are 3 to 5 feet in height. Plants should be spaced 3 to 5 feet apart in rows 6 to 8 feet apart. This will allow room for spread and access for harvesting berries. Gooseberries should be spaced 3 to 4 feet apart in rows 6 to 8 feet apart. Both species should be pruned to help with shape and fruit production. Plants should be pruned during the dormant season (November to March). Instead of pruning the ends of branches off, remove the entire length of older branches to maintain plant vigor. Fruit is produced on 1-, 2- and 3-year-old branches so plan to prune off older branches over time for best production.





Variety selection

Varieties of currant and gooseberries can be selected based on color, taste, disease resistance, and presence of thorns.

Black, red, pink, and white are the most common colors of berries. The size of berries is relatively small compared to some fruits such as strawberries, but the quantity produced from mature bushes can be quite large. A mature currant or gooseberry plant can produce 5 quarts of fresh fruit. Tools that help growers “comb” the berries off currant plants can be purchased. Some find this makes harvesting large amounts of berries easier; however, leaves and other detritus will need to be removed from berries harvested in this manner.

Berry flavor also varies between species. Tartness is often the biggest factor when selecting for taste. Thorniness is another factor to consider when choosing between species. Currant stems lack thorns,



while gooseberries generally have small thorns. There have been fewer varieties of gooseberries developed due to the presence of thorns. Harvest berries when they are large and/or the proper color. Some types of gooseberries are harvested before they are fully ripe to allow them to slowly ripen and increase flavor.

Native species of currants and gooseberries should not be ruled out. It is important to remember not all native species are well adapted for backyards or landscapes. Some native *Ribes* species require riparian areas (wet soils) for growing. The total yield of fruit, berry taste, and production may be less ideal compared to commercial varieties. Native species can be purchased through native plant nurseries, seed vendors, and sometimes local conservation district plant sales.

Overall, currants and gooseberries are relatively easy to grow and provide small but attractive flowers each spring. There are few disease and insect issues to look out for. For more information on those issues, please refer to the *Wyoming Vegetable & Fruit Growing Guide*, bit.ly/WY-fruit-veg.

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CURRANTS

BLACK

- ‘Ben Sarek’ (highly resistant to blister rust, but susceptible to mildew)
- ‘Titania’ (highly resistant to mildew and blister rust)
- ‘Consort’ (highly resistant to blister rust)

WHITE

- ‘White Imperial’ (very mildew resistant)
- ‘Blanca White’ (very mildew resistant)
- ‘Primus White’ (susceptible to mildew)

RED

- ‘Red Lake’ (mostly resistant to blister rust but susceptible to mildew)
- ‘Rovada’ (resistant to mildew and leaf spot diseases)
- ‘Tatran’ (very resistant to mildew)

GOOSEBERRIES

- ‘Pixwell’ (pink) (mildew resistant)
- ‘Invicta’ (resistant to mildew but not leaf spot)
- ‘Poorman’ (very resistant to mildew)