

Growing Currants Gooseberries Honeyberries & Jostaberries in Montana



Flavorful, nutritious and attractive, currants, gooseberries, honeyberries and jostaberries are an excellent source of Vitamin C. They produce a delicious fruit in late summer and are great for fresh eating and make wonderful jams, jellies and juices.



Both currants and gooseberries are attractive deciduous shrubs which may be used to attract birds and to make preserves, jellies and pies. Three or four currant and gooseberry plants usually produce enough fruit for the average family. A properly maintained planting should continue to produce for 10 or more years.

Soil

Currants and gooseberries survive on relatively infertile soils, but are better adapted to rich, well-drained, clay loam soils. For vigorous plants and good fruit production they require at least 18" of fertile well-drained soil with an ideal PH of 6.5. If your soil is heavy clay, it may be necessary to build a raised bed to ensure adequate drainage.

Site and Planting

Currants and gooseberries are self-fertile and hardy to zone 3. They reach a height and spread of 4' and should be spaced 3-5' apart in a full sun to part shade area. Bare root plants should be planted in the spring. Containerized plants can be planted any time of the year. After planting, strip off all flowers and begin harvesting one year after planting. Gooseberries and currants will develop larger fruit when there is good pollination and seed development. Most cultivars are self-fertile, but, as with many other fruits, higher yields and larger fruit size are usually achieved with cross-pollination. Therefore, it is generally desirable to plant more than one cultivar.

Irrigation and Fertilizing

Currants and gooseberries require even soil moisture. Use a mulch to help maintain the moisture. They are heavy feeders, so a balanced fertilizer is needed. Apply a balanced fertilizer like 14-14-14 at bud break every year in the spring.

CURRANTS

Currants are a striking sight when in fruit. Large clusters of red, white or black berries cascade down the heavily laden branches. These plants make a spectacular display in the garden and on your table.

Pruning

Black Currants bear fruit on 1 and 2 year old wood. When planting, cut to ground all but 2 or 3 canes. Head the remaining stems back to one bud. Thereafter, every late winter or early spring remove all canes over 2 years old, and thin out the rest until you are left with 6 to 10 of the strongest canes.

Red and White Currants bear fruit on short spurs on older wood and at the base of 1 year old shoots. Cut all but 2 or 3 of the strongest stems to the ground at planting. For the next 2 years in late fall or early spring, cut out most of the youngest stems. Starting in the fourth year, also cut out the 4 year old stems. A mature plant should have some 1 year, 2 year, and 3 year old stems.

Variety We Carry

- **Red Lake Currant**
Ribes rubrum 'Red Lake'
Zone 4
3-5' Wide x 3-4' Tall

Red Lake Currant is a vigorous, very productive shrub with clusters of attractive, large bright red berries. Berries are tart with a pleasant mild flavor and can be eaten fresh or they make excellent preserves.

Harvesting

Currants may be picked singly or in clusters.



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GOOSEBERRIES

While gooseberries are close cousins of currants, they have their own special character. Larger and sweeter, gooseberries resemble grapes in size, shape and flavor and are considered better for fresh eating. Most gooseberry plants are thorny, while currants are not. Fruits may be pink, purple or green when ripe.

Pruning

After planting, thin all but the strongest shoots by cutting to the ground; leave no more than 6 stems. On established plants, during dormant season, prune old, unproductive stems to the ground, usually those over 3 years old. In summer trim side branches back to 3-5 leaves. Thin stems as needed for easy picking.

Variety We Carry

- **Pixwell Gooseberry**
Ribes hirtellum 'Pixwell'
Zone 4
4-6' Tall x 3-4' Wide

Gooseberries produce pale green, medium sized, sweet berries that turn pink when ripe. This is a productive, hardy shrub with few thorns. Long stems make easy picking.

Harvesting

Gooseberries are often stripped from the branches with a glove-covered hand if they are to be processed immediately. Harvest more carefully to avoid puncturing the fruit on the thorns if the fruit is to be stored for any length of time. Flats of gooseberry fruit should be stored in the shade since they sunburn easily. Fruits are usually picked at the firm green stage, when they are too tart to eat fresh, and make into pies or preserves.

HONEYBERRY

Honeyberry taste has been compared to blueberries, blackberries, raspberries or black currants. They are an excellent source of antioxidants and Vitamin C. Most of the shrubs grow 5-7 feet tall and wide, and do best in full sun, in hotter regions part sun is ideal.

Preparation Honeyberries grow best in moist, well drained soil. A pH of 6.5 is ideal, but they are adapted to a pH range of 5-8. Space plants 5-7 feet apart in rows. These shrubs like a humus-rich soil. Dig a one foot diameter hole and amend the soil with peat moss and compost.

Pruning Little pruning is needed on bushes younger than five years old other than removing dead, diseased, or broken branches. Prune older branches when bush gets too dense, never more than 25% of a bush at a time. Recommend pruning late winter or early spring. Since Honeyberries bloom so early in the spring, the shrubs may need protection from late spring frosts.

Harvesting Honeyberries start producing fruit the first year after transplanting, but it takes a number of years to reach full production. They flower early, two weeks before strawberries. They fruit for two to three weeks in the spring, and will produce for 30 years. You can harvest the fruits by placing an umbrella, kiddie pool or plastic sheeting on the ground and shaking the fruits off, make sure the berries are a dark blue all the way through when harvesting

* You need at least two different varieties for cross pollination.

Varieties We Carry

Aurora - Zone 2
3-4' x 5-10' *Lonicera caerulea 'Aurora'* has large sweet berries.
*Is pollinated by *Borealis* and is used to pollinate *Tundra* and *Borealis*.

Berry Blue - Zone 3
4' x 3' *Lonicera caerulea 'Berry Blue'* flavor comparable to wild blueberries with a hint of currant. Can be eaten fresh or used to make jam.
*Use as a pollinator for *Tundra*, *Borealis*.

Borealis - Zone 2
4' x 4' *Lonicera caerulea 'Borealis'* Great for fresh eating, pies or jams and jellies.
*Requires *Berry Blue* or *Polar Jewel* to set fruit.

Polar Jewel - Zone 2
5-10' x 5-10' *Lonicera edulis kamschatica 'Polar Jewel'* extremely cold tolerant. Great for fresh eating, recipes, jams and jellies.
*Use as a pollinator for *Tundra* and *Borealis*.

Tundra - Zone 2
4' x 5' *Lonicera caerulea 'Tundra'* is a smaller drought tolerant bush. Great for fresh eating, jams or jellies.
*Requires *Berry Blue* to set fruit.

JOSTABERRY (pronounced– yust-a-berry)

Jostaberries have a rich berry taste that is a blend of black currant and gooseberry, sweet and satisfying. The glossy round berries are firm, plump and loaded with Vitamin C. The fruits are abundant starting in early July, they start full production their second year and are self-pollinating.

Site and Planting

Jostaberries reach a height of 4-6 feet tall and 4 feet wide. Space about 6' apart in well drained, slightly acidic soil. Grow in full to part sun; in hotter regions, afternoon shade is best.

Pruning

In early winter, prune any weak, damaged, diseased or crossing stems. Trim to allow air movement through the center of the plant. In the summer, shorten the new growth to prevent the plant from getting too big and growing out of control. After several years, you might want to rejuvenate the bush by cutting out some of the oldest branches from the base, allowing new branches to grow and eventually fruit.

Harvesting

July of their second year is when production starts. Pick jostaberries when they are fully colored, reddish-black, black or dark purple, and soft. Pick them in dry conditions, wet berries do not store well. Berries can be kept in the refrigerator for 5 to 6 days or frozen for later use. Use garden nets to protect your berries from the birds. Because they flower in early spring, they may need protection from late-spring frost in colder climates.

Fertilizing Honeyberry & Jostaberry

Fertilizing your bushes based on a soil test is best. If growing in poor soils, or you notice nutrient deficiency on leaves and small fruit, use an organic fertilizer in the spring, or a balanced fertilizer like 14-14-14

40 lbs of compost or manure per 100 sq. ft is the recommended rate for home production.

Variety

- Jostaberry - *Ribes culvernelii*
4-6' tall x 4' wide Zone 3



2025 2nd Ave. NW
Great Falls, MT 59404
Phone: 406-727-0950 Fax: 406-727-4817
Email: mail@forde-nursery.com
www.forde-nursery.com

