

Red Currant, White Currant

Ribes rubrum, *Ribes sativum*, and *Ribes petraeum* are members of the Saxifragaceae (saxifrage) family.

Red and white currants are essentially the same fruit, differing only in color. Cultivars come from combinations of three main species of *Ribes*, all of them deciduous shrubs. *Ribes rubrum* is an upright shrub found from northern Europe to Siberia and Manchuria. *Ribes sativum* (*R. vulgare*), which includes the large-fruited Cherry cultivar, is a spreading shrub from the temperate region of western Europe. The vigorous *Ribes petraeum*, which includes the Prince Albert and Goudouin cultivars, is a native of high mountain areas of north Africa and Europe.

Flowers are borne toward the base of 1-year-old stems and on spurs on older stems. Each bud opens into a number of flowers that are joined together on a delicate, drooping stem called a *strig*. Most cultivars have self-fertile flowers, but a few are partially self-sterile.

Market Information

Use. When picked just after they turn red, red currants are unsurpassed for jelly making. They are also used for pies and sauce (sometimes in combination with other fruit) and for wine. The crushed fruit makes a cool, refreshing summertime drink. Some currants can be eaten out of hand if left on the bush for about 3 weeks after the berries first turn red (red cultivars) or translucent (white cultivars). Currants are popular among northern Europeans. They are little known in America because they were banned by federal law in 1920 as a supposed carrier of white pine blister rust. The ban was lifted in 1966, and currants are now enjoying some renewed interest in the United States.

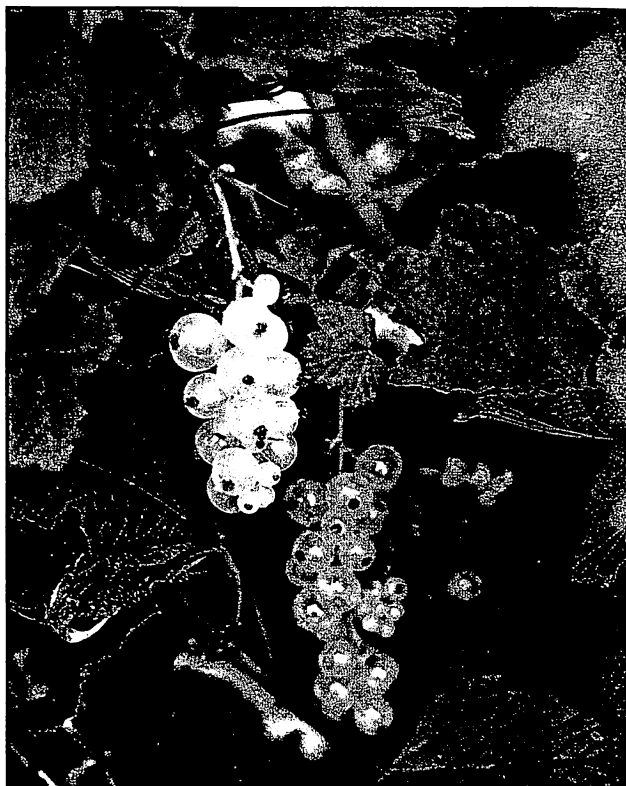
Culture

Climatic requirements. Currants thrive in cool, well-drained fertile soil, in full sun or in partial shade. In warm regions, the bushes prefer heavy soil and should be planted in partial shade or on a north-facing slope. An organic mulch can be used to protect the roots and keep the soil cool and moist.

Propagation and care. Currants are propagated from hardwood cuttings of year-old wood. They usually are grown as bushes spaced 5 feet apart. To grow currants in tree form, remove all but the top three buds



Ripe red currants, ready to be picked.
(Photo: Bernadine Strik)



Ripe white currants. (Photo: Bernadine Strik)

from the cutting so sprouts will not grow from below the ground. Set cuttings in the ground in the fall or early spring.

Annual pruning will increase yield and keep plants manageable and healthy. Prune so that most fruits will be borne on spurs of 2- and 3-year-old wood. To maintain a supply of two or three each of 1-, 2-, and 3-year-old stems, use a renewal method of pruning. In the first winter, remove all but two or three stems at ground level. The second winter, remove all but two or three of the stems that grew the previous season. At this point the bush will have two or three each of 1- and 2-year-old stems. Continue this practice every winter. In the fourth winter, cut away any stems more than 3 years old at their bases and shorten long or low-hanging branches.

If you want to grow different cultivars in a small area or against a wall, you can grow currants in cordons as single stems. Plant cordons 1½ feet apart or train them against a wall. To develop a cordon, shorten the single upright stem each winter to 6 inches of new growth and shorten any laterals to two buds. In summer, pinch developing laterals to five leaves as the berries begin to color. When the leader reaches its set height, shorten it

each winter to one bud of the previous season's growth, and prune the laterals each winter and summer as before.

Currants have a moderate need for nitrogen and a high potassium requirement. An annual dressing of ½ ounce of actual potassium per square yard will prevent potassium deficiency, which is visible as scorching of the leaf margin. Currants are sensitive to chloride ion toxicity, so muriate of potash (potassium chloride) should not be used.

Pests and diseases. Currants can be grown with little or no spraying. They may require treatments including spraying if such pests as aphids, spider mites, and currant borers cause damage. The imported currantworm, usually a gooseberry pest, can defoliate currant plants quickly. An appropriate insecticide should be applied as soon as currantworm is detected. By cleaning up leaves in autumn, you can help prevent potential disease. Fungicides can be used to control powdery mildew, leaf spot, and anthracnose.

Harvest the whole strig intact unless the fruit is to be used immediately. Ripe currants are very soft and easily injured.

Sources

Plants

NOTE: Red Lake, Wilder, and Minnesota 71 are excellent cultivars and are widely available. Jonkheer van Tets and Cherry are resistant to powdery mildew. The following nurseries offer more extensive selections of cultivars.

Alexander Eppler Ltd., P.O. Box 16513, Seattle, WA 98116-0513

International Ribes Association, c/o Anderson Valley Agricultural Institute, P.O. Box 130, Boonville, CA 95415

Southmeadow Fruit Gardens, Lakeside, MI 49116

Whitman Farms Nursery, 1420 Beaumont NW, Salem, OR 97304

More information

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