

These fruits can weather Wyoming's harsh winters and wow summer palates

Two to three mature gooseberry or currant plants are usually enough to keep most families stocked with berries for fresh eating, cooking and preserving.

BY BRIAN SEBADE

Currants and gooseberries are well-suited for Wyoming's climate.

These perennial shrubs are in the *Ribes* genus and offer a fair number of cultivar options.

Currants and gooseberries can be planted in landscapes and do not need special garden beds. They do best in full to partial sun but are adaptable and can survive in shaded areas, too. Consider planting on the north side of buildings in areas of high elevation or low-lying areas to delay the blooming, which helps avoid frost damage to blossoms.

Most currant and gooseberry cultivars are USDA hardiness zones 3 or 4, which makes them ideal for Wyoming. Adding several inches of mulch at the base of plants reduces competition from weeds and grass, helps maintain moisture for plant roots and reduces injury from mowers and weed eaters.

Production

They bloom early in spring and produce fruit during the middle of July to early August. Most currants will produce fruit in a one- to two-week window, while gooseberries produce over a longer three- to four-week period. Well-drained soils that remain cool through the growing season with adequate moisture are best. These plants can survive in slightly acidic and alkaline soils. Currants and gooseberries have moderate nutrient needs, so incorporating organic matter before planting is useful. Also consider adding fertilizer or organic matter around established plants.

Size and Space

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 high. Plants should be spaced 4 to 6 feet apart to allow room

to spread and for access to harvest berries. Gooseberries have more of a spreading growth pattern and should be spaced farther apart if left unpruned.

Prune both species to help with shape and fruit production. Remove older branches to maintain plant vigor instead of pruning off the ends of branches. Aim to maintain 1-, 2- and 3-year-old branches on plants for best production. Plants should be pruned during dormancy (November-March).

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)



Potential disease and insect issues to monitor:

- Powdery mildew
- Anthracnose
- Currant aphid
- Currant fruit fly
- Leaf spot
- White pine blister rust

Variety Selection

Black, red, pink and white are the most common colors. The berry size is relatively small compared to some fruits such as strawberries, but the quantity produced from mature bushes can be quite large.

Berry flavor also varies between species. Tartness is often the biggest factor when selecting for taste.

Currant stems lack thorns, while gooseberries generally have small thorns. There have been fewer varieties of gooseberries developed due to the thorns.

Harvest berries when full and have proper color. Some types of gooseberries are harvested before they are fully ready to harvest to allow them to slowly ripen and increase flavor. Berries can be left for wildlife as well. Some varieties that do not bear fruit are used for ornamental purposes.

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