

Cooperative Extension



Currants are thornless, small (about 3-6 feet), compact shrubs that bear small (the size of a large pea or small grape) fruits on a cluster (like grapes) and are very suited for Delaware home gardens. They live 12 to 15 years, so it is important to prepare the soil prior to planting. They prefer well-drained with good organic matter soils. If your soils are clay or sandy you can add compost and/or other organic matter (leaves, peat moss, sawdust, chopped straw, etc.) to improve the conditions for growing. If your site is slow to drain you may want to grow them in raised beds. Currants like a pH of 5.5 to 7.0 so get a soil test before you plant then adjust with fertilizer or lime according to test results.

Before purchasing any plant, you should research and plan, and consider the following:

- Which varieties grow best in Delaware
- Desirable characteristics in the plant and/or variety (overall size at maturity, color of flowers, and/or fruit)
- Growing location (to meet the plants and your landscape needs) and
- The plants growing requirements like, sun, shade, space, soil, pH, and water needs.

They will tolerate part shade and should be spaced 3 to 5 feet apart, providing good air circulation around and through the plant to reduce disease problems like downy mildew. The European Black currant is also the host for White Pine Blister Rust, a serious disease. I would not recommend growing any variety that is susceptible to this disease. **In Delaware above the C and D canal, you are not allowed to grow currants at all and below the canal you will need a permit from the Delaware Department of Agriculture. For a permit or more information, contact Randy Ciurlino, at 1-800-282-8685.**

In addition to White Pine Blister rust and powdery mildew, currants may get Anthracnose. Pests that attack currants are: the currant borer, currant fruit fly, imported currant worm, aphids, mites and leafhoppers.

Currants are self fertile, meaning you only need one cultivar for fruit production. However, to get larger fruit you will need to plant more than one cultivar. The fruits taste very to slightly tart and are used in jelly, juice, pies, syrups, sauces, wines, and other deserts. There are black, red, pink and white currant varieties. Red, pink and white currants are members of three European species: *Ribes rubrum*, *R. petraeum* and *R. sativum*. The European Black currant species are *Ribes nigrum* and Asian *R. ussuriense*.

Blackberries, raspberries and/or strawberries are the most common small fruits found growing in many gardens in Delaware, but there are other small fruits that should be considered. If you are thinking about adding a new small fruit to your garden area, why not consider Currants?

Red varieties

- **Rovada**—Large fruit on long strings; heavy producer; easy to pick, excellent for cooking; hardy in zones 3-7.
- **Jonkheer van Tets**—Dutch variety. Early maturing; known for flavor, extra large fruit; hardy in zones 3-7; powdery mildew resistant.
- **Red Lake**—American variety. Productive plants with dark red, high quality berries. Cold hardy, moderately susceptible to powdery mildew.
- **Perfection**—English variety. Excellent fruit quality; slightly susceptible to powdery mildew.
- **Cherry**—American variety. Good fruit quality, very productive; slightly susceptible to powdery mildew.
- **Cascade**—Bears large beautiful red fruit; a heavy producer.
- **Rosetta**—Very productive variety; bears large glowing red fruit; excellent for cooking.

Pink varieties

- **Pink Champagne**—beautiful, translucent pink fruit; good quality, flavor for eating fresh. Resistant to leaf diseases; hardy in zones 3-7.
- **Rosasport**—bears small clusters of very good tasting pink berries.
- **Jules**— small berry size; a little tart to the taste.

White varieties

- **Blanka**—heavy yielder of white opaque fruit; tart taste until fully ripe. Used for juice, wine making and eaten fresh.
- **Primus**—very sweet and tasty variety; self-pollinating with long fruit clusters.
- **White Imperial**—White, translucent fruit with pink tint; rich flavor and hardiness. Introduced in 1895.
- **White Grape**—Very old variety. Fruit has a good flavor Cold-hardy. The.

Black varieties

- **Baldwin**—English variety. Very productive of medium quality fruit; highly susceptible to White Pine Blister Rust.
- **Minaj Smyriou**—a Bulgaria. Heavy producer; resistant to White Pine Blister Rust; excellent for jelly.
- **Consort**—Canadian variety. Immune to White Pine Blister Rust, slightly susceptible to powdery mildew; excellent fruit quality and production.
- **Titania** (US Patent No. 11,439)—Excellent yields and large fruit; immune to White Pine Blister Rust, good resistance to Powdery Mildew.
- **Topsy**—Good fruit quality, very good production; medium susceptibility to White Pine Blister rust and powdery mildew.
- **Ben Nevis**—excellent fruit quality, high production; slightly susceptible to White Pine Blister Rust; no susceptibility to Powdery Mildew.
- **Ben Lomond**—Excellent fruit quality and production; slightly susceptible to White Pine Blister rust and powdery mildew.

- **Ben Sarek**—Excellent producer, excellent fruit quality; not susceptible to White Pine Blister rust and powdery mildew.
- **Crandall**—Large dark red to black berries; eaten fresh or processed for jelly, jam and syrup; introduced in 1888; not susceptible to White Pine Blister rust.
- **Crusader**— Produces good yields of dark black berries; needs another variety for pollination; carries a dominant gene for rust immunity.

Like most fruits, Currants are pruned during late winter when they are dormant. When planting new plants, prune back leaving 2-3 buds on each stem above the ground (about 5-10 inches from the soil). In the second year, remove all weak and/or damaged stems (canes). Mature black, red and white currants fruit differently and are pruned differently. For example, Black currants produce on 1 year-old wood and on mature plants; keep a total of 10 to 12 canes. Half should be 1 year-old shoots. Red and white currants produce their fruit on spurs on 2-3 year old wood, so leave 9 to 12 main canes of these; 3 to 4 each of 1, 2 and 3 year-old wood.

Currants ripen over a 2-week period; you can keep the berries on a bush a week or more without them dropping. This convenience allows you to harvest all your fruit in one to three pickings ensuring that you don't pick immature or unripened fruit. The fruit freezes nicely for using later in the year. A mature plant may yield from 4-6 quarts or 5-8 pounds of fruit.

For more information, contact:

Maggie Moor-Orth
Home Horticulture agent
(302) 857-6426
mmoore@desu.edu



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