

Being hardy, the currant is comparatively easy to cultivate, but, even then, there is the right way which gives the very best results, and the wrong way which may lead to complete failure.

The chief types under cultivation are red, black and white currants.

Soil and Location.—Heavy clay loam, well drained, cool and moist, preferably in a partly shaded position or with a northern exposure, constitutes almost ideal conditions for the currant. The bushes are shallow rooted and will not do well in a very dry, warm, sandy soil. If the soil is not rich in plant food, work in good well rotted manure.

Propagation.—(1) By cuttings, made in late summer from the season's growth and planted at once four inches apart in rows three feet apart. The cuttings should be eight to ten inches long, and should be planted so as to leave only one or two buds exposed.

(2) Layering. Bend a stem over until it touches the ground and cover with soil, leaving tip exposed. If this is done in midsummer, the new plant may be separated and planted in nursery row in the fall, as described for cuttings.

Planting.—Plenty of space is good for the plants, as it induces better growth and more fruit. A good distance is six feet each way in the hill system and four feet apart in rows six feet apart for the continuous row. Strong one-year-old plants are the best, but two-year-old ones are better than weak yearlings. The plant should be set at least an inch deeper than it stood in the nursery row. Where early spring planting is not possible it is better to plant in the fall, as the sprouts start early in the spring.

Cultivation.—The cultivation should be shallow, on account of the shallow root system. Frequent cultivation is essential to keep up the dust mulch and prevent evaporation of moisture, as well as to keep down grass and weeds. In a very clean orchard where there is no danger of weeds, a mulch of straw, sawdust, etc., may be employed to conserve the moisture.

Pruning.—A currant bush should consist of six or eight stems, forming a fairly open (but not straggly) bush. No wood older than four years should be kept, but each year a couple of old canes should be removed and an equal number of young ones left to take their places. Red and white currants bear most of the fruit on two or three-year-old wood. Black currants are dependent on the one-year-old wood for most of the fruit. Pruning should be governed by these facts. Many authorities recommend fall pruning, while others prefer the spring about the time that the leaves are out. Pinching back rapidly growing shoots in early summer induces bushy growth and permits a better development of the fruit. If the old wood is gradually removed year by year, the bushes are kept vigorous and prolific for many years.

Yield.—The fruit ripens during the latter part of July. A yield of 100 bushels or 4,000 pounds per acre is not by any means considered a "bumper crop," while 15 bushels is an average. The red currants are perhaps better yielders on an average than the black or the white. A half-dozen plants should produce enough to supply the average household.

Winter Protection.—Being entirely hardy, currants do not need any winter protection other than that which is afforded by the shelter-belts around the orchard and the blanket of snow which lies on the western prairie all winter. If the season is dry or if the soil is getting poor, it is well to apply a mulch of good manure around the bushes in the fall and work this into the ground in the spring without injuring the roots of the plants.