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Currants and Gooseberries

By A. P. Stevenson



A. P. STEVENSON.

Of all the different kinds of small fruit grown none is grown with less labor than the currant in its different classes, red, white and black. It is also adapted to many varieties of soil and climate and can be grown to good advantage all over our Western provinces. It is largely grown, but certainly the currants grown in many gardens are not of a size or quality to encourage new beginners. As without doubt this is the first fruit planted in home making, it should be well known that there is no fruit that responds so readily to a little care and cultivation as the currant. But nothing will give such disappointing results if neglected and allowed to grow among grass and weeds. The following hints and suggestions will be of value in the management of this fruit.

Planting and Cultivation

Although being easily grown and also native of our country, for best results the bushes should be planted in well drained, rich soil, well prepared the year previous to planting, and given good cultivation afterwards. Keep clear of all grass and weeds and it will be surprising to see the fine size and juicy quality of the fruit. Start with young two-year-old plants. Set them out in a long row for convenience in horse cultivation. The plants should be four feet apart in the row and the rows five feet apart. All planting should be done in spring. Use the one horse cultivator frequently during the summer. Wood ashes make a good fertilizer together with barnyard manure.

The red and black currant bear the larger portion of their fruit on wood of different ages. The black currant bears most of its fruit on wood of the previous year's growth. In consequence it is important to have always a good supply of one-year-old healthy wood. The red and white currants produce their fruit on wood that is two years old and older, but the best fruit is produced on wood from two to four years. Nearly all varieties of currants send up a number of young shoots each year. The pruning should consist of removing all but three or four of these new shoots each season, and at the same time some of the old wood may be removed close to the ground. By following this plan the entire bush will be renewed every few years. It is well not to have any of the branches more than four years of age. Do not, under any circumstances, try to grow your currant bushes in tree form—nature intended it for a bush and you cannot improve on this system. Early spring is the proper time to prune the currant.

Renewing and Propagation

A currant plantation will bear a large number of good crops if well cared for, but if neglected the bushes soon lose their vigor. But a currant plantation can be renewed with little labor. It is best to have new bushes coming on a year or two before removing the old ones. About eight years is the limit of profitable

bearing. It should then be rooted out after that. The usual method of propagating currants is by cuttings which root very readily. Sometimes good plants can be got from one year's growth. Cuttings can be made either in the spring or fall. We favor making them in the spring. The wood should be of the current season's growth, and it is important the cuttings be taken off in spring before the buds begin to swell. Ten inches is the usual length, and when made the cuttings should be planted at once in mellow soil. Plant deeply so that only one bud will show above the ground and slope at an angle of 45 degrees. This will ensure strong rooted plants.

Currants as a rule are hardy and safe to plant anywhere in our country, but are much benefited by a good winter blanket of snow. I will mention only a few varieties out of the many we have tried that are giving good satisfaction.

Red varieties:

Perfection—This is a cross between Fays and White Grape. A great bearer of large fruit of fine quality.

Italy Castle—A well known variety, a strong upright grower. Fruit medium in size and quality.

North Star—Originated in Minnesota, where it is highly prized. A good bearer of medium sized fruit.

Of the white varieties we have tried nothing that is any improvement on the well known White Grape. There are not as many black currants grown in our country as red or white, but there is a yearly increasing demand for bushes to plant out to grow more of this excellent fruit. Lees Prolific and Black Naples are the two best varieties in our experience. Crandall is a variety of the Buffalo currant, size extra large, blue black, peculiar flavor, medium quality, a strong, upright grower.

The currant worm and lice are the two chief sources of trouble in currant growing. As soon as the first appear, one ounce of powdered hellebore in a pailful of water applied with a whisk is a safe remedy. The other pest, plant lice, can be controlled by spraying with coal oil emulsion; applied so that it must reach the under side of the leaf.

Gooseberries

The gooseberry belongs to the same family as the currant, and its management is much the same as has been advised for the currant. As a rule gooseberries are not as hardy as currants and should never be planted in exposed locations. Brush makes an excellent winter protection. The gooseberry is a moisture loving plant and delights in a deep rich moist soil, well manured. Gooseberries are difficult to grow from cuttings in this country and layering is the usual method used for propagation. This is done in July. Earth is heaped up around and through a fair sized bush until only the tips of the young shoots are left uncovered. The following spring most of the bushes will have formed roots; these should be cut up and planted out. All English varieties are a failure with us. They are too tender and subject to mildew. The following varieties have given us good crops. They are mentioned in order of merit: Carrie, Houghton, Mabel, Downing, Rideau, Pearl and White Transparent. Gooseberries should always be grown in bush form, and if well pruned and manured the plantation will not need to be renewed for 10 years.



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