



Plants For A Future

*Edible, medicinal and useful plants
for a healthier world*

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Database Name:

Ribes nigrum - L.

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Blackcurrant

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Author	L.	Botanical references	11, 17, 200
Family	Grossulariaceae	Genus	Ribes
Synonyms	<i>Ribes pauciflorum</i> - Turcz.		
Known Hazards	None known		
Range	Europe, including Britain, from Scandanavia south and east to France, Bulgaria, N. and C. Asia.		
Habitat	Hedges and woodlands, often by streams[9, 17].		
Edibility Rating	 5 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 3 (1-5)

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Physical Characteristics

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A deciduous Shrub growing to 1.8m.

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It is hardy to zone 5 and is not frost tender. It is in leaf from March to November, in flower from April to May, and the seeds ripen from July to August. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees. The plant is self-fertile.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It requires moist soil.

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Woodland Garden; Sunny Edge; Dappled Shade; North Wall By; East Wall By;

Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Fruit](#); [Leaves](#).

Edible Uses: [Tea](#).

Fruit - raw or cooked. An excellent aromatic flavour[K]. The fully ripe fruit is very acceptable raw, though it is more often cooked and used to make pies, jams etc[1, 2, 5, 9, 34]. Very rich in vitamin C[244]. The fruit is about 10mm in diameter[200], though selected cultivars have larger fruits[K]. The leaves are used in soups[183]. The dried leaves are a tea substitute[74, 177, 183]. They are sometimes added to blended herb teas[238].

Medicinal Uses

[Diaphoretic](#); [Diuretic](#); [Febrifuge](#); [Miscellany](#).

Blackcurrant fruits are a good source of minerals and vitamins, especially vitamin C. They have diuretic and diaphoretic actions, help to increase bodily resistance to infections and are a valuable remedy for treating colds and flu[4, 254]. The juice, especially when fresh or vacuum-sealed, helps to stem diarrhoea and calms indigestion[4, 254]. The leaves are cleansing, diaphoretic and diuretic[4, 9]. By encouraging the elimination of fluids they help to reduce blood volume and thereby lower blood pressure[254]. An infusion is used in the treatment of dropsy, rheumatic pain and whooping cough, and can also be used externally on slow-healing cuts and abscesses[9]. It can be used as a gargle for sore throats and mouth ulcers[254]. The leaves are harvested during the growing season and can be used fresh or dried[238]. It is believed that an infusion of the leaves increases the secretion of cortisol by the adrenal glands, and thus stimulates the activity of the sympathetic nervous system[254]. This action may prove useful in the treatment of stress-related conditions [254]. An infusion of the young roots is useful in the treatment of eruptive fevers[4]. A decoction of the bark has been found of use in the treatment of calculus, dropsy and haemorrhoidal tumours[4]. The seed is a source of gamma-linolenic acid, an unsaturated fatty acid which assists the production of hormone-like substances[238]. This process is commonly blocked in the body, causing disorders that affect the uterine muscles, nervous system and metabolism[238]. We have no records of the oil from this species being used medicinally, though it is used in cosmetic preparations[238, K].

Other Uses

[Cosmetic](#); [Dye](#); [Preservative](#).

The oil from the seed is added to skin preparations and cosmetics. It is often combined with vitamin E to prevent oxidation[238]. A yellow

dye is obtained from the leaves[100]. A blue or violet dye is obtained from the fruit[100]. The leaves are used for vegetable preservation [74]. No more details.

Cultivation details

Easily grown in a moisture retentive but well-drained loamy soil of at least moderate quality[11, 200]. Best grown on a deep sandy loam [1]. Dislikes very heavy clay, chalky soils and thin dry soils, but it can succeed on most soil types if plenty of organic matter is incorporated [1]. Plants require plenty of nitrogen if they are to do well[200]. Prefers a pH in the range 6.7 to 7 and is intolerant of acid soils[200]. Plants are quite tolerant of shade though do not fruit so well in such a position[11]. Plants fruit less freely when grown in windy sites[200]. The plant is hardy to about -20°C, though flowers are damaged at -1°C [200]. Blackcurrants are widely cultivated in temperate areas for their edible fruit, there are many named varieties[183, 200]. Most fruit is produced on one year old wood. Pruning usually consists of removing about a third of all the stems from just above ground level in the autumn. The oldest stems with least new growth are removed since these will be the poorest fruiters. The plant is able to make new growth from the base of the removed stems and, if the plants are well fed, this growth is very vigorous and will fruit heavily the following year. The flowers can self-fertilize but many cultivars fruit better with insect pollination[200]. Plants can harbour a stage of 'white pine blister rust', so they should not be grown in the vicinity of pine trees[155]. Plants in this genus are notably susceptible to honey fungus[200].

Propagation

Seed - best sown as soon as it is ripe in the autumn in a cold frame. Stored seed requires 3 months cold stratification at between 0 and 5°C and should be sown as early in the year as possible[113, 164]. Under normal storage conditions the seed can remain viable for 17 years or more. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and grow them on in a cold frame for their first winter, planting them out in late spring of the following year. Cuttings of half-ripe wood, 10 - 15cm with a heel, July/August in a frame[78, 113]. Cuttings of mature wood of the current year's growth, preferably with a heel of the previous year's growth, November to February in a cold frame or sheltered bed outdoors[78, 200].

Cultivars

'Amos Black'

'Ben Alder'

'Ben Lomand'

A vigorous upright bush, it is usually free from foliage-

damaging insects[183]. One of the highest-yielding blackcurrants and also one of the least prone to mildew[183].

'Ben More'

'Ben Sarek'

A large black fruit of good quality[183]. A small compact bush, it is highly productive[183]. Resistant to frost and mildew[183].

'Ben Tirran'

'Cotswold Cross'

'Wellington XXX'

A medium to large fruit, the skin is thick but tender, the flavour subacid, somewhat sweet when fully ripe[183]. Ripens early mid-season[183]. The berries do not hang well on the bush and often split[183]. A large very vigorous and productive spreading bush[183].

Links

References

[K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2] **Hedrick. U. P.** *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World.* Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9 Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[5] **Mabey. R.** *Food for Free.* Collins 1974 ISBN 0-00-219060-5 Edible wild plants found in Britain. Fairly comprehensive, very few pictures and rather optimistic on the desirability of some of the plants.

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants.* Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[11] **Bean. W.** *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in Great Britain. Vol 1 - 4 and Supplement.* Murray 1981

A classic with a wealth of information on the plants, but poor on pictures.

- [17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press 1962
A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.
- [34] **Harrison. S. Wallis. M. Masefield. G.** *The Oxford Book of Food Plants.* Oxford University Press 1975
Good drawings of some of the more common food plants from around the world. Not much information though.
- [74] **Komarov. V. L.** *Flora of the USSR.* Israel Program for Scientific Translation 1968
An immense (25 or more large volumes) and not yet completed translation of the Russian flora. Full of information on plant uses and habitats but heavy going for casual readers.
- [78] **Sheat. W. G.** *Propagation of Trees, Shrubs and Conifers.* MacMillan and Co 1948
A bit dated but a good book on propagation techniques with specific details for a wide range of plants.
- [100] **Polunin. O.** *Flowers of Europe - A Field Guide.* Oxford University Press 1969 ISBN 0192176218
An excellent and well illustrated pocket guide for those with very large pockets. Also gives some details on plant uses.
- [113] **Dirr. M. A. and Heuser. M. W.** *The Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation.* Athens Ga. Varsity Press 1987 ISBN 0942375009
A very detailed book on propagating trees. Not for the casual reader.
- [155] **Arnberger. L. P.** *Flowers of the Southwest Mountains.* Southwestern Monuments Ass. 1968
A lovely little pocket guide to wild plants in the southern Rockies of America.
- [164] **Bird. R. (Editor)** *Growing from Seed. Volume 4.* Thompson and Morgan. 1990
Very readable magazine with lots of information on propagation. A good article on Yuccas, one on Sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp) and another on *Chaerophyllum bulbosum*.
- [177] **Kunkel. G.** *Plants for Human Consumption.* Koeltz Scientific Books 1984 ISBN 3874292169
An excellent book for the dedicated. A comprehensive listing of latin names with a brief list of edible parts.
- [183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants.* Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9
Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.
- [200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening.* 1992.

MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses*. Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[244] **Phillips. R. & Foy. N.** *Herbs* Pan Books Ltd. London. 1990 ISBN 0-330-30725-8

Deals with all types of herbs including medicinal, culinary, scented and dye plants. Excellent photographs with quite good information on each plant.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

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