

## **Currants**

The hardy and easy-to-grow currant has a tart flavor that makes it a favorite for homemade jellies and jams.

However, the black currant is sometimes outlawed because it is an alternate host for white pine blister rust. This means blister rust needs a second kind of plant--in this case, black currant shrubs--to spread the disease from white pine to white pine. Red and white currant varieties and newer black ones are resistant to the pine rust. Consult your agricultural experiment station or county extension office for up-to-date regulations and the best varieties to grow in your area. States with few pine trees place no restrictions on growing currants.

### **Varieties**

The standard red varieties include Wilder and Red Lake, both vigorous and with tart berries. Cascade and Perfection are also popular reds. White Grape is a productive white (or yellow) variety. Currant varieties are self-fertile, so you can get good fruit with only one bush.

### **Planting**

A hardy plant, currants do best in cooler regions and in soil that is moist but well drained and well supplied with nutrients. Set out young plants in the fall or early winter, because they leaf out early in the spring. If winters are brutal in your area, wait until spring to plant currants. Pick a lightly shaded area or spot shaded from the hot afternoon sun. Allow five feet between plants, trim tops back to six to 12 inches after planting, and mulch. Shrubs will bear in about two years.

### **Care and feeding**

Many gardeners claim that currants respond better to organic fertilizers, such as manure and compost, than to commercial fertilizers. Keep four to six inches of mulch around plants. Prune out oldest branches, along

with weak, crowded, or bushy twigs each year while the currant shrubs are dormant.

### **Harvesting**

Pick berries for jellies or jams before they are fully ripe to preserve pectin content. Break or twist off the cluster stem and remove currants.