BEFORE YOU START

Your state may have laws restricting the growing of Ribes because of a fungus called White Pine Blister Rust. Check with your state's Department of Agriculture about local regulations.

Choose a sunny location but avoid southern exposure and southern-facing slopes since intense sun may injure the plants. Northern slopes that protect from the direct sun are ideal for Ribes plantings. Currant and gooseberry plants will tolerate partial shade and prefer a moist, cool growing area. Ensure your site has adequate air circulation to decrease the prevalence of powdery mildew; planting on a slight slope will facilitate air circulation. Avoid low areas prone to late spring frost because plants flower early.

Eradicate all perennial weeds before planting.

Plant currants and gooseberries in rich, well-draining soil that contains at least 2–3% organic matter. If possible, avoid sandy soils. If your field has light-textured, sandy soils, incorporate organic matter to improve the soil.
It is advantageous to have your Agricultural Extension Service perform a crop-specific soil test eight to ten (8-10) months before your planned planting date. Early identification of precisely what nutrients or amendments are needed, and how much, allows optimized application. Some amendments require time to take effect, and some are less effective when applied to the soil surface.

Plant as soon as possible in the spring, after your soil has warmed to 50°F. Planting too early, in cool, damp soil, can delay development or cause roots to rot. Do not fertilize at planting.

Access to water is important as plants have a very shallow, fibrous root system, making them easily drought-stressed.

Most varieties are self-fruitful, but in larger plantings, it is beneficial for production to grow more than one variety.

SPACING

- Three to four feet between plants.
- Rows should be at least six feet apart. Consider equipment access after plants reach maturity.

PLANTING

Planting at the correct depth is essential. Plant the root ball deeply enough to cover it with ½ inch of soil and refrain from pruning. Because air circulation is critical for suppression of foliar disease, do not plant too densely.

IRRIGATION

Check soil moisture regularly. Maintain adequate moisture levels, especially immediately following planting. Plants should receive one to two inches (1-2") of rainfall or equivalent per week, throughout the growing season. Gooseberry fruit is more susceptible to sunburn if the soil is too dry. Planting on a slope facilitates water drainage. If you use overhead irrigation, irrigate early in the day so the plant will dry before evening. This practice will help prevent diseases. Drip irrigation is the most efficient irrigation method and is healthiest for the plants. Plants will require more water under hot, sunny conditions and when developing fruit.

FERTILIZATION

If you didn't test the soil and apply fertilizer and amendments earlier, you may thoroughly incorporate a light amount of fertilizer at least two (2) weeks before planting. No fertilization is required during the planting year. In following years, it is beneficial to do crop-specific soil testing for pH and nutrient availability, so you can tailor fertility management to current conditions and plant needs. Alternatively, apply 5 ounces of 10-10-10 per plant. Apply the fertilizer in the early spring or use half the amount (2 ½ ounces) in the spring and apply the remaining 2 ½ ounces in early summer. Apply under branches and around the dripline. For mature plantings, do soil testing or spread six-eight (6-8) ounces of 10-10-10 per plant or 25-50 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre.

Do not fertilize after July 1, as late fertilization can generate tender new growth that will be more susceptible to winter injury. Currant and gooseberry plants respond well to annual organic matter amendments.

MULCHING/WEED CONTROL

Eradicate all perennial weeds before planting! Regular, manual weeding will be necessary. Weeds and crops compete for the same resources, including sunlight, water, and nutrients. When weeds deprive a crop of these resources, the crop yield is negatively impacted. Some weeds can also carry crop pathogens or serve as hosts for damaging insects.

Mulch is a protective layer of material applied to soil surface. It helps with such things as weed control, water retention, and soil erosion. We recommend lightly mulching with 2–3 inches (2-3") weed-free straw during establishment. We do not recommend using leaves or grass clippings as mulch, as they can mat and smother plants, while also harboring pests.

PRUNING

Ribes produce new growth from their crowns under the soil annually. Currants and gooseberries bear fruit on wood that is 3 years old or younger. Do not prune currants or gooseberries for the first three (3) growing seasons unless you discover broken, damaged, or diseased canes. In the succeeding years, late in the dormancy period, remove the oldest canes as close to the ground as possible. Your plant should have no more than three 1-year-old canes, three 2-year-old canes, and three 3-year-old canes. Be sure to remove canes from the center of each plant to increase air circulation and sun exposure. Remove low, weak canes. Cane stubs above ground can be entry sites for insects and disease pathogens.

TRELLISING

Trellising is not required unless training the plants in cordon form, but it makes harvesting easier, especially when working with thorny gooseberry plants.

HARVESTING

Remove all flowers during the first year and do not allow berries to develop. Allowing fruit to develop on first-year plants may stunt growth and delay establishment. Removing flowers enables the plant to focus on vegetative growth, redirecting its energy into developing a strong root system and a robust canopy. You can expect a light crop the second year, and a full crop yield in the third year.

Red currants turn red before they are fully ripe; allow them to remain on the plant a little longer to develop more sweetness. Gooseberries can be harvested when they are full size but not quite ripe to be used in pies, but for fresh eating, allow full ripening on the shrub.