

Blackcurrants

Blackcurrants were traditionally used only for jams, pies and puddings, and they tasted great. More recently, there are varieties the size of small grapes which are tasty eaten by themselves, with ice cream or cream. Mixed with other fruit, they are delicious.

An easy crop to grow in the garden, they are however expensive in the supermarkets. Home grown, they are almost free and packed full of vitamins, especially vitamin C.



BLACKCURRANT QUICK GUIDE

Latin Name

Ribes nigrum

Type

Hardy deciduous shrub with edible berries

Site and Soil

Tolerant of many conditions. Preferably full sun, on a rich well-drained soil.

Plant to Harvest Time

2 years

Yield

4kg (9lb) per bush

Varieties of Blackcurrant

The table below lists some other varieties recommended by GardenAction.

Variety	Type	Comments
Ben Gairn	Early	Resistant to most diseases affecting blackcurrants including Reversion virus. One of the earliest varieties to fruit, it has medium sized berries with a good taste.
Ben Hope	Mid-season	Resistant to most foliar diseases and also to bigbud. This variety grows taller than most blackcurrants but it has the best flavour of all varieties. Needs a sheltered position.
Titania	Mid-season	Large tasty blackcurrants on a tallish bush. Needs a protected position. Good disease resistance.

Site and Soil For Blackcurrants

Blackcurrants are more tolerant than many fruits of their site and soil conditions.

What they do like though is a moist soil, but not water logged. They need the moisture for the fruits to develop. This is one reason why they do well in less dry parts of the UK.

Their ideal site is in full sun, but the effect of partial shade does them little harm. Avoid frost-pockets, their flowers can be damaged by a late frost which will of course result in a lower yield of fruit.

Their ideal soil is a rich well-drained soil which will not dry out. They prefer a slightly acidic soil - around pH 6 to 6.5 ([click here](#) for more details on soil acidity). They will grow well however on most normal soils.

Planting Blackcurrants

Blackcurrant bushes are available in pots or bare-rooted from garden centres or come bare-rooted through the post.

Dig the soil to a spade's depth a couple of month's before planting - this will allow the soil to settle. Add as much well-rotted compost as is available and dig it in well. Where compost is not available, add a good handful or so per square metre (yard) of bonemeal or any other long lasting fertiliser.

The best time to plant blackcurrant bushes is early winter, [mid-November](#) time is good. They can however be planted any time up to [mid-March](#) as long as the soil is not water-logged or frozen. The plants should be spaced about 1.8m (6ft) apart. Dig a hole wide enough to take the roots without cramping them.

The depth of planting is quite important with blackberries. The bushes naturally produces a large number of stems from just below ground level (unlike red and white currants). To encourage this growth, plant the bushes roughly 5cm (2in) deeper than they were in the pot or at the nursery if bare-rooted. Fill around the roots with soil and firm it down with your foot.

When planted, trim every shoot to within two buds above soil level. This may sound drastic, because it will result in the plant only being about 5cm (2in) high. However, it will encourage a strong root system as well as sturdy growth above ground.

Care of Blackcurrants

Watering, weed prevention and pruning are the key requirements for blackcurrants. They will appreciate watering when conditions are dry and especially when the fruits are forming. Keep the weeds at bay to prevent competition for moisture.

An annual mulch of garden compost will make easy work of both if available. Where you have no garden compost, covering the surrounding soil with a weed control fabric will do exactly the same job and will last for many years. [Click here](#) to buy your weed control fabric online. A good two handfuls of bonemeal in spring spread around each plant will also do a whole lot of good.

Do not prune the plants in the first winter after planting. In the second and subsequent winters, prune to encourage new growth. Firstly, remove any stems which are damaged, diseased or crossing each other. Then, trim away 20% of the central part of the plant to leave the centre more open. Finally, remove about 15% of the remaining old wood.

Propagating Blackcurrant Bushes

Hardwood cuttings are a great way to create more blackcurrant bushes, because it's easy, quick and has a very high chance of success. Additionally, it does not require any protection or warmth. Let gardenaction guide you through this process with pictures and sound advice.



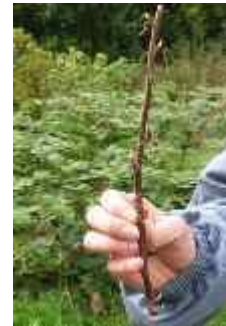
[Click to enlarge](#)

The time to propagate the bushes is when the foliage has stopped growing and is beginning to turn brown or falling off. A good time is [mid-October](#) although a couple of weeks later is almost as good.

Take cuttings from healthy bushes only - ignore bushes with any signs of disease.

Select a healthy looking stem of ripened (brown not green wood) and cut a 25cm (10in) length.

The cut should be made just below a bud. Pull off all the leaves from the stem being careful not to remove the stem. The result should look like the picture on the right ([click picture to enlarge](#)).



[Click to enlarge](#)



[Click to enlarge](#)

Dig a trench about 15cm (6in) deep and incorporate a handful of bonemeal into the removed soil.

Place the cuttings into the trench making sure that at least two buds will remain above the soil surface and that there are four or more buds below the surface. Space the cuttings 20cm (8in) apart ([click picture to enlarge](#)).

Fill in around the cuttings with the removed soil, being careful not to damage the buds below or above the soil. Gently firm the soil down around the cutting with your foot.

Water the soil well. It is a good idea to mulch around the cuttings with well-rotted compost to conserve water. In the



picture on the right (click to enlarge),
old carpets are used a mulch.

Click to enlarge

Harvesting and Storing Blackcurrants

Blackcurrants are ready for harvest when the fruits are very nearly black. Always try and pick them in dry conditions - wet blackcurrants store very badly and will quickly go mouldy.

If the intention is to store the currants for a few days, it's best to pick an entire truss which will keep for longer. Blackcurrants will keep best dry in the fridge and will last for five or six days.

Pests and Diseases

Look at the symptoms to decide which pest or disease is causing you trouble, then click on the 'Cause' for details of how to get round the problem.

CAUSE	SYMPTOMS
<u>Rust</u>	At first, red spots appear on the top of the leaves, followed by yellow spots on the underside of the leaves, eventually turning black.
<u>Aphids</u> (green/black fly)	Lots of small black or green insects especially concentrated around tender new shoots.
<u>Sawfly</u>	Caterpillars on the leaves. Bush is very quickly stripped of foliage.
<u>Mildew</u>	A light grey powdery substance appears mainly on the stems, but spreads to the leaves and possibly the fruit.
<u>Big Bud Mite</u>	Round and plump buds rather than the normal long and pointed ones. Leaves around affected buds are distorted.
<u>Reversion Disease</u>	In June or July the bush develops abnormal leaves, and the yield of fruit for the rest of the year is very low. It is most easily identified by bright magenta buds instead of the normal grey buds.