

Gooseberry Bushes

An ideal fruit for the small garden - gooseberry bushes are easy to grow, produce a large amount of fruit for their size and will tolerate partial shade conditions.

They are self-fertile, so one bush can be grown on its own. Gooseberry bushes are also well able to withstand harsher conditions (both temperature and wind) than many other fruits. This makes them a good choice for cooler areas.

Usually grown in the form of a small bush, they can be trained to any shape and are especially recommended for pot culture.

Where To Grow Your Gooseberry Bush

Gooseberry bushes are very tolerant of different conditions, although in an ideal setting they prefer full sun in cooler areas of the UK. The lower temperatures allow the fruit to mature slowly rather than being 'cooked' into maturity by a warm sun. They are well-suited to the Midlands and North West of England. Tolerant of partial shade, the variety Whinams Industry prefers a partial shaded site - a North facing wall suits it fine.

GOOSEBERRY QUICK GUIDE

Latin Name

Ribes grossularia

Type

Hardy deciduous shrub (height 1m (3ft), spread 1.5m (5ft)).

Site and Soil

Sunny (part shade is OK). Soil well drained, well-dug and composted before planting.

Plant to Harvest Time

2 years.

How Many?



Left - the variety Leveller.
Possibly the best tasting gooseberry.

Unfortunately, gooseberries are not so tolerant of bad soil conditions - they need a medium weight soil which is well-drained but not dry. They need moisture in the soil if the fruits are to develop fully. They do not require a very fertile soil, too fertile and the plant produces too much weak green growth at the expense of good fruit.

When and How To Plant A Gooseberry Bush

The best time to plant is [October](#); the soil is still warm, and this allows the roots to establish themselves quickly before the rest of the plant begins to put on new spring growth. Any time up to [February](#) is satisfactory, as long as the soil is not frozen or water-logged.

Prepare the soil in advance of planting, gooseberry bushes will be productive for up to 20 years, so a little effort at this stage will satisfy their needs for well-drained, medium type soil. Dig a hole of about 1m (3 ft) round, incorporate as much organic material as possible. Do the digging in [August](#) to give the soil time to settle by [October](#) . Where more than one bush is being planted, allow 1.6m (5ft) between bushes.

At planting time in October, dig out a 60cm (2ft) hole in the centre of the previously dug area to a depth so that the soil mark on the bush will come to the existing soil level. Place the bush in the hole, spread out the roots evenly and replace the soil, firming it down with your foot.

Taking Care of Gooseberry Bushes

Gooseberry bushes are relatively simple to care for, each of their needs is dealt with below.

Watering and Feeding

Gooseberry bushes need the soil to be kept moist, especially when the fruit is being formed. In dry periods during [June](#) to [August](#), water them to keep the soil moist.

Put a layer of organic material to act as a mulch around (but not touching) the main stem each Spring. Where no organic material is available, incorporate a couple of handfuls into the top soil around the bush and cover the soil with bark chipping or similar to prevent the growth of weeds. A couple of handfuls of bonemeal applied again [September](#) should be all that is needed.

Bird Protection

Sparrows are notorious for pecking out the young fruits in [May](#) time, and then coming back for more in [July](#) to eat the almost ripened fruits. It's a matter of luck if you suffer from this nuisance. One solution is to wind coloured cotton thread round the branches which will deter the birds to some degree.

Pruning

Prune the bushes in [February](#) each year. Keep the centre of the bush clear of most growth by cutting out any weak or dead branches. On the outside of the bush, young growth should be left untouched, older and longer side shoots should be cut back to within 2cm (1 inch) of their base. The aim is to achieve a wine glass shape with the centre of the bush reasonably clear of growth.

Harvesting Your Gooseberries

Most varieties of Gooseberry bush produce both cooking and eating gooseberries - those for cooking being harvested earlier than those for eating.

In order to encourage the best berries, pick about 10% of the fruit in [May](#) time when they are pea-sized, these can be used for cooking. This will encourage the remaining fruits to become larger.

When the gooseberries look ready for harvest in [July](#) time, first pick those fruits which are shaded at the bottom and in the middle of the bush - these will be the first to stop improving. Leave the fruits on the outer edges of the bush to be picked a week or so later.

Pests and Diseases

Gooseberry bushes grown in the UK are remarkably free from pests and diseases. They are on occasions attacked by Gooseberry Sawfly caterpillars which are capable of stripping the plant of all foliage. As soon as foliage damage is noticed, examine the

plant for caterpillars and pick them off by hand. If the numbers of caterpillars are large, spray with derris (available at almost all garden centres).

[Click here](#) for more details on identifying and treating Gooseberry Sawfly caterpillars.

The biggest pest is birds, sparrows in particular. Coloured cotton wound round the plant at strategic places will go some way to prevent the birds getting at the fruit. Most garden centres have bird-repellant sprays - ask at your garden centre which is best for your area.

Which Variety

INVICTA



Click on the picture for a larger version. A very compact plant which is ideally suited to growing as a standard in or out of a container - see the next page ([or click here](#)) for details on how to grow gooseberry bushes in containers. Produces masses of fruits in [July](#) to [August](#) which are extremely tasty. Definitely one for the small garden. A GardenAction top recommendation.

CARELESS

The fruit is creamy-white, large and long, smooth and very attractive looking. The bush has slender spreading branches. Produces lots of fruit which is ideal for use in bottling and preserves. Good disease resistance.

WHINHAM'S INDUSTRY



Click on the picture for a larger version. A red-fruited variety which is also suited to the small garden and container growing. Does well in partial shade and will even fruit well when planted under a tree. Good for a north facing-wall.

LEVELLER



Click on the picture for a larger version. This variety is rightly popular, producing some of the tastiest fruits of all gooseberries. The fruits are produced around [July](#), and can be used for for cooking or immediate eating - traditional oval gooseberry shape, with yellow and green colouring. If you choose this one, get the soil preparation correct and it will do very well.

Container Growing Gooseberries

You will need the following:

Large pot, terracotta is ideal
Stones for drainage

Compost - John Innes No 2 is best

Gooseberry bush -1m (3ft) standard, or a 1 to 2 year old bush

Fill the base of the pot with a layer of stones to provide drainage, and cover them with some of the compost.

Remove the bush from its container and place in the terracotta pot. Adjust the level of compost so that the soil mark on the bush main stem sits about 2cm (1in) below the rim of the new pot.

Fill in the pot with remaining compost to 2cm (1in) below the rim. Gently firm the compost down during this process.

Water well throughout the summer when the fruit is developing and feed with a liquid fertiliser once a week. If the plant is a standard, stake well soon after planting.

Varieties to choose are 'Invicta' and 'Whinham's Industry'.