

BLACK CURRANTS

Ribes nigrum

Description

Of crop:

Currants are bush berries, similar to blueberries that reach four feet in height. Unlike many berries, the stems are thornless. The fruit grows in loose clusters and is smooth-skinned. The tart flavor of the fruit lends itself to processing, primarily in jams and jellies. Production in Washington is on a limited basis for local consumption. Black currants are typically grown in Western Washington on relatively small plantings.

The genus *Ribes* is native to the high latitudes of the northern hemisphere. Europe, Asia, and North America all have native species. Most commercial production is concentrated in Europe and the USSR. The largest commercial use of currants is for juice production. Black currants have the highest Vitamin C content of all temperate fruits, with only Barbados cherry and rose hips having higher levels. Black currants also contain bioflavonoids, which are agents that reduce blood pressure.

Fifteen different varieties of black, red, and white currants were planted at WSU-NWREC in Mount Vernon in 2001. Some of the varieties from Scotland show promise. Resistance to mildew and the currant sawfly were observed in a few of the black currant varieties. Several varieties show good productivity and disease resistance with acceptable plant growth habit for possible mechanical harvesting. Varieties that appear productive in our area are Ben Alder, Ben Lomond, Ben Nevis, Ben Sarek, Ben Tirran, Magnus, Titania, and Tsema.

Berry processing plants and machinery are established in western Washington, and this technology may be adapted readily to currant culture and processing. The challenges to be met are dealing with the need to process a product that may have a narrow, limited market, and finding a wholesale market that is profitable. Mechanized picking is needed to reduce labor costs. Also, competition from other regions where currants grow well and market structure is already established could be problematic.

Key pests:

Weeds are pests of black currant. Of these, Canada thistle and grasses are the most problematic.

Key pesticides:

Simazine and glyphosate are used for weed control. Canada thistle is hoed or pulled by hand.

Expert contacts:

Gary A. Moulton
Scientific Asst Sr., MVREU
WSU Mount Vernon NW REC
16650 State Route 536
Mount Vernon, WA 98273-4768
(360) 848-6131



Sources:

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