

Plant Data Sheet: Black gooseberry/ swamp currant (*Ribes lacustre*)

Range

Black gooseberry occurs throughout Canada from Newfoundland to the Yukon Territory and in Alaska. It extends south into the continental United States in the Coast and Cascade ranges to northern California, in the Rocky Mountains to central Colorado and northern Utah, in the Great Lake States, and in the Appalachian Mountains. Black gooseberry also occurs in the Black Hills of the Great Plains region⁽¹⁾.

Climate, elevation

Black gooseberry is found in cool, moist climates. It occurs from 7,700 to 10,500 feet in Utah, 7,000 to 11,400 feet in Colorado, 3,500 to 10,700 feet in Wyoming, and 3,000 to 8,700 feet in Montana. At the southern extremes of its range (California, Utah, Colorado, and West Virginia), black gooseberry occurs in cool, high-elevation forests⁽¹⁾.

Local occurrence (where, how common)

In our area, black gooseberry is widespread and common.

Habitat preferences

Black gooseberry prefers moist woods and streambanks to drier forest slopes and ridges. It is often found on rotting wood^(1,4).

Plant strategy type/successional stage

Black gooseberry is moderately shade tolerant, but grows vigorously in canopy openings. It establishes in partial shade or full sun after disturbance and then persists in the understory of closed canopy forests. Seedlings are suppressed on sites with more than 75 percent full shade⁽²⁾.

Associated species

Due to its wide range, black gooseberry is found with many species. Some examples in our region include western red cedar, western hemlock, devil's club, leafy moss (Mosses spp.), oak fern (Gymnocarpium dryopteris), Schuber's moss (Platanus schubertii), common ladyfern (Adiantum filix-femina), and horsetail (Equisetum spp.). In the Olympics Mountains, it is often found with mosses (Hedera discolor), thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus), and common snowberry (Symphoricarpos albus)⁽³⁾.

May be collected as (seed, layered, divisions, etc.)

Black gooseberry can be propagated by seed or vegetative cuttings.

Collection restrictions or guidelines

Vegetative cuttings should be collected in the fall. Collect seed promptly when the fruit ripens in autumn to prevent bird herbivory. The fruit should be macerated, and the seed extracted and dried⁽³⁾.

Seed germination

Seed in heat sown in a cold frame as soon as it ripens in the autumn. If stored, the seed requires four to six months of cold stratification at about 0°C for 120-200^(2,3). It should then be planted early in the spring. Germination is best when the seed is sown less than 1 cm deep in moist soil. Place seedlings in individual pots when they are large enough to handle and grow them in a cold frame for their first winter. They can be potted up or installed in the late spring of the following year⁽³⁾.

Seed life (can be stored, short shelf-life, long shelf-life)

Under normal storage conditions the seed can remain viable for 17 years or more⁽²⁾.

Recommended seed storage conditions

Most *Ribes* species store well when sealed in a container with a low moisture content. Variable temperatures do not appear to significantly affect viability⁽²⁾.

Vegetative Propagation

Cuttings of half-ripe wood can be collected in July or August and should be 15-20 cm long and with a heel. They should be planted immediately in well-drained soil. One or two buds should be exposed. Cuttings of mature wood of the current year's growth, preferably with a heel of the previous year's growth, can be collected from November to February and placed in a cold frame or sheltered bed outdoors⁽³⁾.

Propagation recommendations

Propagation by seed and cuttings are both widely recommended.

Soil or medium requirements (incubation necessary?)

Black gooseberry is easily grown in moist but well-drained heavy soil⁽³⁾.

Installation form

Plants can be installed as contained plants at a year or two old. Direct sowing is not recommended.

Recommended planting density

Shrubs should be planted three to five feet on center depending on desired density and anticipated mortality⁽³⁾.

Normal rate of growth or spread; lifespan

Mature height is typically 1.5-2 meters⁽¹⁾.

Sources cited

(1) Crony, J. H. (1995). *Ribes lacustre*. Fire Effects Information. United States Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture. <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/index.html>. Retrieved May 21, 2003.

(2) Pinton, R. *Ribes L. Currant, gooseberry*. [Manual](http://plants.usda.gov/Manual). United States Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture. <http://plants.usda.gov/Manual>. Retrieved May 18, 2003.

(3) Plants for a Future. *Ribes lacustre*. <http://plants.pfaf.org/375831.pdf>. Retrieved May 18, 2003.

(4) Pajon, J. & MacKinnon, A. (eds.) (1994). *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast*. Vancouver, BC: Lone Pine.

(5) Sound Native Plants. <http://www.soundnativeplants.com>. Retrieved May 18, 2003.

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