Grossulariaceae—Currant family

Ribes L.

currant, gooseberry

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Growth habit, occurrence, and use. The currant and gooseberry genus—*Ribes*— includes about 150 species of deciduous, (rarely) evergreen, shrubs that grow in the colder and temperate parts of North America, Europe, Asia, and South America. The unarmed species are commonly called currants; the prickly species are gooseberries. Of the more important species for which seed data are available, 16 are native to the United States and 1 was introduced from Europe (table 1). These species generally occur as rather low-growing shrubs, although 3 species can attain heights of 3 to 4 m (table 2).

Six of the more showy species-alpine, American black, golden, wax, clove, and winter currants-are cultivated for their colorful fruit, attractive flowers, and ornamental foliage. Berries are made into jam, jelly, pie, juice, and syrup. All native species are valuable as food and cover for wildlifeand many provide browse for livestock (Plummer and others 1968). Golden and clove currants have been used in shelterbelt plantings in the prairie-plains and intermountain regions. The former also has been widely planted for erosion control (Pfister 1974). Golden, wax, white-stem, and gooseberry currants are valued as ornamentals in the United States and Canada (Barnes 1986). Currants are shade tolerant (Quick 1954). Many species regenerate vegetatively as well as from seed (Dittberner and Olson 1983; Wasser 1982). Most are rhizomatous (Lotan and others 1981). Seeds of currants remain viable in soil for long periods of time (Lyon and Stickney 1976).

Germination is stimulated by disturbances such as fire (Lotan and others 1981; Morgan and Neuenschwander 1985; Young 1983). Consequently, currants are common pioneer species on hot burns occurring on xeric sites (Hopkins and Kovalchik 1983). However, their seedcoats are relatively thin and may be destroyed by severe fires. Moist mineral soil with high amounts of humus provides a good seedbed for currants. Seeds are often introduced to the seedbank by birds and mammals that cannot digest the seeds (Lyon and Stickney 1984). Moss and Wellner (1953) suggested that, in the northern Rocky Mountains, seeds are also directly deposited simply by falling to the ground below parent plants. Seeds remain viable in the soil for long periods of time (Lyon and Stickney 1976). Moss and Wellner (1953) found soil-borne seeds of prickly currant more than 200 years old.

Many species serve as alternate hosts to white pine blister rust—*Cronartium ribicola* J.C. Fischer—a disease that has severely affected forest ecology and forest management practices (Ketcham and others 1968). Wax currant has also been shown to produce allelopathic effects (Heisey 1982).

Geographic races. Nine of the species listed (table 1) have recognized varieties; these species are pasture, Sierra, and Missouri gooseberries, and alpine, clove, winter, wax, Hudson Bay, and sticky currants. Distinctions in the first 5 species are not clearly related to geographic races, whereas the last 4 species contain geographic races (Hitchcock and others 1955; Rehder 1940; Steyermark 1963).

Flowering and fruiting. Flowers are bisexual (dioecious in alpine currant), usually small and greenish, but yellow to red in some species (Rehder 1940). The flowers are borne singly or in few- to many-flowered racemes from April to June (table 3). Flowers are often wind-pollinated (Quick 1954). Fruit is a green, many-seeded, glandular or smooth berry 6 to 13 mm in diameter (figure 1) that ripens in early to late summer. Mature fruits are red in some species, from purple to black in others, and occasionally red, yellow, or black within a species (table 4). Bees are very important to pollination of some European currants (Blasse and Hofman 1988). A mature seed (figure 2) is filled with a large endosperm containing a minute, rounded embryo (figure 3). Seeds are dispersed almost entirely by birds and mammals during the summer and fall.

The earliest seedcrops produced by Sierra gooseberry and prickly and sticky currants are borne when the plants are 3 to 5 years old. Good seedcrops are borne at intervals

Table I — Ribes, currant, gooseberry: nomenclature and occurrence

Scientific name & synonym(s)	Common name(s)	Occurrence
R. alpinum L. R. opulifolium L.	alpine currant	Europe to Siberia
R. americanum P. Mill. R. floridum L'Herit.	American black currant	Nova Scotia to Alberta, S to Virginia & New Mexico
R['] aureum Pursh Chrysobotrya aurea (Pursh) Rydb. R. flavum Colla; R. tenuiflorum Lindl.	golden currant, slender golden currant, flowering currant	E Washington to Saskatchewan & South Dakota, S to California & New Mexico
R. aureum var. villosum DC . R. odoratum H.Wendl. Chrysobotrya odorata (Wendl.) Rydb.	clove currant, buffalo currant	South Dakota & Minnesota, S to Missouri, W Texas, & Arkansas
R. cereum Dougl. R. churchii A. Nels & Kenn. R. inebrians Lindl.; R. pumilum Nutt.	wax currant, squaw currant	British Columbia to central Montana, S to northern Mexico
R. cynosbati L. Grossularia cynosbati (L.) Mill. R. gracile Michx.	pasture gooseberry, eastern prickly gooseberry	Nova Scota to Alberta, S to Virginia, Nebraska, & New Mexico
R. hudsonianum Richards. R. petiolare Dougl.	Hudson Bay currant, wild black currant, northern black currant	Alaska to Hudson Bay, S to N California, Utah, Wyoming, & Minnesota
R. inerme Rydb. Grossularia inermis (Rydb.) Cov. & Britt. R. divaricatum Dougl. var. inerme (Rydb.) McMinn R. þurþusii Koehne ex Blank.	white-stem gooseberry	British Columbia to Montana, S to California & New Mexico
R. lacustre (Pers.) Poir. Limnobotrya lacustris Rydb. R. echinatum Dougl.; R. grossulariodes Michx. R. parvulum Rydb.	prickly currant, swamp gooseberry, swamp black currant	Alaska to Newfoundland, S to California, South Dakota, & Pennsylvania
R missouriense Nutt. Grossularia missouriensis (Nutt). Cov. & Britt. R. gracile Pursh, not Michx.	Missouri gooseberry	Minnesota to Connecticut, S to Tennessee, Arkansas, & Kansas
R montigenum McClatchie Limnobotrya montigena McClatchie Rydb. R. lacustre var. molle Gray. R. lentum Cov. & Rose; R. molle Howell	gooseberry currant, alpine prickly currant, mountain gooseberry	British Columbia to Montana, S to S California & New Mexico
R. nevadense Kellogg R. ascendens Eastw.; R. grantii Heller	Sierra currant	S Oregon, N California, & W Nevada
R. oxyacanthoides ssp. irriguum (Dougl.) Sinnott R. irriguum Dougl. R. divaricatum var. irriguum (Dougl.) Gray Grossularia irrigua (Dougl.) Cov. & Britt.	Idaho gooseberry, inland black gooseberry	British Columbia, S to NE Oregon & E to W Montana
R roezlii Regel Grossularia roezlii (Regel) Cov. & Britt. R. amictum Greene; R. aridum Greene R. urlsonianum Greene	Sierra gooseberry	California & Nevada
R. rotundifolium Michx. Grossularia rotundifolia (Michx.) Cov. & Britt. R. triflorum Willd.	roundleaf gooseberry, Appalachian gooseberry	Massachusetts to New York S to North Carolina
R. sanguineum Pursh Calobotrya sanguinea (Pursh) Spach Coreosma sanguinea (Pursh) Spach R. glutinosum Benth.	winter currant, red flowering currant, Oregon currant, blood currant	W British Columbia, S to California
R viscosissimum Pursh Coreosma viscosissima (Pursh) Spach R. halli Jancz.	sticky currant	British Columbia to Montana, S to California & N Arizona

Source: Pfister (1974).

Species	Growth habit	Height at maturity (m)	Year first cultivated
R. alþinum	Dense, unarmed shrub	0.9–2.4	1588
R. americanum	Unarmed shrub	0.6–1.8	1727
R. aureum	Unarmed shrub	0.9–3.0	1806
R. aureum var. villosum	Unarmed shrub	0.9–3.0	1812
R. cereum	Unarmed shrub	0.3–1.5	1827
R. cynosbati	Prickly shrub	1.5	1759
R. hudsonianum	Unarmed shrub	0.3–1.8	1899
R. inerme	Prickly shrub	0.9–2.1	1899
R. lacustre	Prickly shrub	0.3–1.8	1812
R. missouriense	Prickly shrub	0.3–1.8	1907
R. montigenum	Low, very prickly shrub	0.3–0.9	1905
R. nevadense	Unarmed shrub	0.9–1.8	1907
R. oxyacanthoides spp. irriguum	Prickly shrub	0.3–2.4	1920
R. roezlii	Prickly shrub	0.6-1.5	1899
R. rotundifolium	Low, prickly shrub	0.9	1809
R. sanguineum	Unarmed shrub	0.9–3.6	1818
R. viscosissimum	Hardy, unarmed shrub	0.3–1.8	1827

Species	Location	Fruit ripening	Flowering
R. alþinum	Europe	Apr–May	July-Aug
R. americanum		Apr–June	June–Sept
R. aureum	_	Apr–May	June–July
R. aureum var.villosum	Wyoming	Late May	Late Aug
	Kansas	Mid–Apr	June
	—	Apr–June	June–Aug
R. cereum	—	Apr–June	Aug
R. cynosbati	—	Apr-early June	Late July–Sept
R. hudsonianum	—	May–July	
R. inerme	—	May–June	—
R. lacustre	—	Apr–July	Aug
R. missouriense	—	Apr-May	June–Sept
R. montigenum	—	Late June–July	Aug–Sept
R. nevadense	_	May–July	
R. oxyacanthoides ssp. irriguum	—	Apr–June	—
R. roezlii	—	May–June	_
R. rotundifolium	_	Apr–May	July–Sept
R. sanguineum	Oregon	Apr–May	July–Aug
-	_	Mar–June	<u> </u>
R. viscosissimum	_	May–June	Aug–Sept

Sources: Fernald (1950), Hitchcock and others (1955), Krüssmann (1960–1962), Loiseau (1945), Munz and Keck (1965), NBV (1946), Petrides (1955), Pfister (1974), Rehder (1940), Stephens (1969), Stepermark (1963), Symonds (1963), Wyman (1949).

of 2 to 3 years (Moss and Wellner 1953; Quick 1954). Clove currant, however, produces good crops annually (Pfister 1974).

Seed collection and extraction. The fruits should be picked or stripped from the branches as soon as they are ripe to preclude loss to birds. Unless the seeds are to be extracted immediately, fruits should be spread out in shallow layers to prevent overheating (Pfister 1974). Berries of alpine currant

are often allowed to ferment in piles for a few days prior to extraction (NBV 1946). Maceration and washing are used to separate the seeds from the pulp. Dried fruits should first be soaked in water before cleaning. Small quantities of berries can be cleaned in a kitchen blender. The berries are covered with water and ground in the blender for 15 to 45 seconds. After the seeds have separated from the pulp, additional water is added to allow the sound seeds to settle. The pulp,

Table 4—Ribes, currant, gooseberry: fruit characteristics and seed storage conditions for air-dried seeds

				Storage conditions		
		Fruit charact	eristics	Temp	Duration	Viability
Species	Surface	Diam (cm)	Ripe color	(°C)	(yr)	at end (%)
R. alþinum	Glabrous	_	Scarlet		_	
R. americanum	Glabrous	0.6	Black	6	4	38
R. aureum	Glabrous	0.6	Red, black, or yellow	21	17	89
R. aureum var. villosum	Smooth	1.0	Black, golden, or reddish brown	21	17	32
R. cereum	Glandular	0.6	Dull to bright red	21	27	4
R. cynosbati	Glandular	_	Reddish purple	21	7	8
R. hudsonianum	Smooth	1.0	Black	21	17	40
R. inerme	Smooth	0.6	Reddish purple	21	11	80
R. lacustre	Glandular	0.6	Purple to black	_	_	_
R. missouriense	Smooth	1.3	Purple to black		_	_
R. montigenum	Glandular	0.6	Red	_		
R. nevadense	Glandular	_	Blue to black	Soil	4	81
	Glandular	_	Blue to black	21	4	88
R. oxyacanthoides ssp. irriguum	Smooth	1.0	Bluish purple		_	
R. roezlii	Glandular	1.3	Purple or deep reddish brown	Soil	13	82
	Glandular	1.3	Purple or deep reddish brown	2	12	45
R. rotundifolium	Smooth	0.6	Purple	—	_	_
R. sanguimeum	Glandular	1.0	Blue to black	—	_	
R. viscosissimum	Glandular	1.3	Black	21	17	23
	_	_	_	21	22	7

Sources: Hitchcock (1955), Jepson (1925), Ketchum and others (1968), Munz (1965), Pfister (1974), Quick (1945, 1947, 1954), Rehder (1940), Stephens (1969).

Figure I—Ribes, currant, gooseberry: berries of R. cereum, wax currant (**upper left**); R. cynosbati, pasture gooseberry (**upper right**); R. lacustre, prickly currant (**middle left**); R. montigenum, gooseberry currant (**middle right**); R. sanguineum, winter currant (**bottom left**); R. viscosissimum, sticky currant (**bottom right**). Figure 2—Ribes, currant, gooseberry: seeds of R. cereum, wax currant (**upper left**); R. hudsonianum, Hudson Bay currant (**upper center**); R. oxyacanthoides ssp. irriguum, Idaho gooseberry (**upper right**); R. lacustre, prickly currant (**center left**); R. montigenum, gooseberry currant (**center middle**); R. nevadense, Sierra currant (**center right**); R. roezli, Sierra gooseberry (**bottom left**); R. sanguineum, winter currant (**bottom center**); R. viscosissimum, sticky currant (**bottom right**).

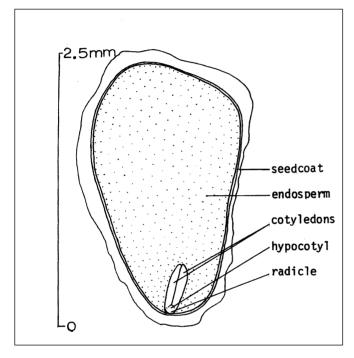




empty seeds, and excess water can then be decanted. Seeds may be washed using a funnel lined with filter paper and then dried on the filter paper (Morrow and others 1954). Munson (1986) recommends replacing the blades in a foodprocessing blender or milkshake blender with a short length of plastic or rubber hose to extract the seeds. Data on the numbers of cleaned seeds per weight are listed in table 5.

Seed yields from 45 kg (100 lb) of berries was 1.8 kg

Figure 3—*Ribes missouriense*, Missouri gooseberry: longitudinal section through a seed.



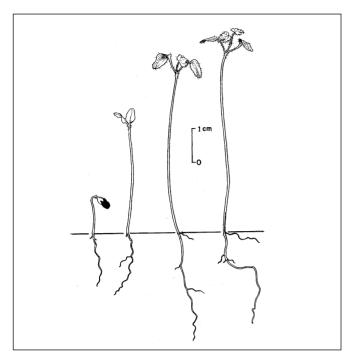
(4 lb) for golden currant, 3.6 kg (8 lb) for clove currant, and 1.8 kg (4 lb) for winter currant (Pfister 1974). One liter of berries from winter currant weighs about 0.5 kg (1 bu weighs about 40 lb). Each prickly currant plant produces around 50 to 75 berries, and each berry has 8 seeds (Moss and Wellner 1953).

Storage. Currant seeds are orthodox and remain viable for long periods when stored in sealed containers at a low moisture content. Temperature is evidently not critical. Samples of Sierra gooseberry seeds buried in soil in inverted open containers for 13 years exhibited 70 to 94% viability (Quick 1947b). Seeds of several species stored dry at room temperature also maintained high viability for periods up to 17 years (table 4).

Germination. In nature, currant seeds normally germinate in spring following dispersal, although some seeds may remain dormant for many years (Moss and Wellner 1953; Quick 1954). The best seedbed appears to be mineral soil well supplied with humus. Germination is epigeal (figure 4). In the laboratory, seeds are slow to germinate except for those of Hudson Bay currant and roundleaf gooseberry. Most species require at least 1 stratification period of fairly long duration to break embryo dormancy (Rudolf 1949). Stidham and others (1980) achieved good germination of golden currant after 10 weeks of wet chilling in distilled water. Impermeable seedcoats also appear to be involved in dormancy of some seedlots of clove and American black currants (Pfister 1974). Germination rate and total can be increased by wet prechilling in sand, peat, or vermiculite or in a mixture of these media. Seed losses from damping-off fungi can be prevented by applying 646 mg of copper

		Cleaned seeds (x1,000)/weight					
	Place	R	ange	Ave	rage		
Species	collected	/kg	/b	/kg	/b	Samples	
R. americanum	_	544–741	247–336	690	313	4	
R. aureum	_	441–628	200-285	514	233	4	
R. aureum var. villosum	North Dakota	234–395	106-179	368	167	8	
R. cereum	California	443–624	201–283	553	251	5	
R. cynosbati	_	417-487	189-221	452	205	2	
R. hudsonianum	Idaho	1,389–2,703	630-1,226	2,127	965	12	
R. inerme	Idaho & California	780–877	354–398	807	366	5	
R. lacustre	California	_	_	1,135	515	I	
R. missouriense	_	344–370	156-168	357	162	2	
R. montigenum	Utah	_	_	313	142	I	
R. nevadense	California	650–935	295–424	862	391	10	
R. roezlii	California	388–650	176-295	520	236	10+	
R. sanguineum	Oregon	_	_	626	284	1	
R. viscosissimum	Idaho & California	562–769	255–344	657	298	5	

Figure 4—*Ribes missouriense*, Missouri gooseberry: seedling development at 2, 7, 23, and 44 days after germination.



oxalate per 100 cm² of culture surface (Ouick 1941). Optimal temperature and duration of stratification vary by species and, to a lesser degree, between seedlots within a species. For most species, a second wet chilling and a repeat germination test are necessary to obtain complete germination of viable seed (table 6). The dormancy irregularity within a seedlot provides a natural adaptive advantage: some seeds germinate immediately and some remain dormant in the forest soil until conditions are optimal for germination and development. Many methods of breaking dormancy have been tried on various species, including acid treatment of seedcoat, warm incubation, freeze-and-thaw, and stratification with alternating temperatures (Quick 1939a&b, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1945, 1947a&b). For most species these treatments offer little advantage over normal wet chilling. A lower temperature can improve germination and reduce wetchilling requirements (Fivaz 1931; Pfister 1974). Stidham and others (1980) used potassium nitrate to improve early germination of golden currant. Most tests were conducted in a greenhouse using sand flats moistened with Hoagland's nutrient solution (Quick 1941). Some species showed considerable germination capacity without wet chilling when

Species	Pregermination treatment		Germination under test	Germination	
	Temp (°C)	Days	conditions* (%)	capacity† (%)	Samples
R. alþinum	0 to 10	90+	80	_	10
R. americanum	–2 to 2	90-120	68	76	39
R. aureum	-2 to 2	60	60	63	19
R. aureum var. villosum	20/0 (D/N)	120	94	98	3
R. cereum	–2 to Ó	120-150	61	72	61
R. cynosbati	–2 to 5	90-150	69	72	19
R. hudsonianum	NP	NP	57	85	116
	0 to 2	90-120	69	76	42
R. inerme	0	120-200	60	74	54
R. lacustre	0	120-200	48	61	64
R. missouriense	–2 to 5	90+	73	_	3
R. montigenum	0	200-300	53	_	6
6	0	120-150	8	33	15
R. nevadense	0	120	78	87	43
R. oxyacanthoides ssp. irriguum	0 to 5	90	79	81	11
R. roezlii	0	100-150	80	87	200
R. rotundifolia	-2 to 0	90+	80	81	10
R. sanguineum	0–2	100-140	61	64	55
R. viscosissimum	-2 to 0	140	58	67	88

Sources: NBV (1946), Pfister (1974), Quick (1939, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1945, 1947).

Note: D/N = day/night, NP = no pretreatment.

* Virtually all of the tested seeds were stratified and germinated in sand moistened with nutrient solution. The germination tests were conducted under greenhouse conditions for periods of 30 to 40 days.

† Germination capacity was determined by retrial stratification and a repeat germination test with conditions about the same as used initially.

investigators alternated diurnal temperatures (25 and 5 or 10 °C)—for example, prickly currant (Miller 1931), clove currant (Quick 1941), roundleaf gooseberry (Fivaz 1931), and sticky currant (Miller 1931). For these tests, 5 minutes of soaking in 2 to 10% sulfuric acid solution improved germination of prickly and sticky currant seeds (Miller 1931). Each species has its own unique germination characteristics, so that no procedure is best for all species. Additional work is needed to fully understand the dormancy mechanisms in the Ribes genus.

Nursery practice. Currant seeds are normally sown in fall, although they can be stratified and sown in spring. Few tests have been conducted to determine which species can be sown in spring without stratification; Hudson Bay currant may be one of these (table 6). Fall-sowing is recommended, especially if seedcoat dormancy is present (Heit 1968). However, Sierra gooseberry seeds must be dried before they

are sown because fresh seeds will not germinate, even after stratification (Quick 1939). If fall-sowing is not possible, the seeds should be stratified before spring-sowing using the procedures summarized in table 6. Seeds should be sown at a rate of 646 to $860/m^2$ (60 to $80/ft^2$) (NBV 1946) or 130 viable seeds/m of row (40/ft) and covered to a depth of 3 to 6 mm (1/8 to 1/4 in) (Pfister 1974). Seeds of Sierra gooseberry and wax and Sierra currants may be covered up to 1.3 cm (1/2 in) (Quick 1939a, 1940).

The only reported experience in nursery stock production is for clove currant (Pfister 1974). Seedbeds are fallsown, mulched to a depth of 5 to 8 cm (2 to 3 in) and covered with snow fence. About 20,000 seedlings are produced per kilogram of seeds (9,000/lb) and the normal outplanting age is 2 years. Most species can be propagated readily from hardwood cuttings taken in autumn (Pfister 1974).

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