

Currants, Gooseberries, Elderberries, Blueberries

Delicious jellies, pies, and sauces can be made from currants, gooseberries, elderberries and blueberries. However, very few Kansas fruit gardens or home landscapes include these fruits.

Currants, gooseberries and elderberries have similar growing requirements and can be grown in many locations. Blueberries grow best in a very acidic soil and cannot be widely grown in Kansas.

Location and Soil Preparation

Currants, gooseberries, elderberries and blueberries grow best in fertile, well drained soils high in organic matter. Do not plant them where water may stand for several days. Light or sandy soils that do not hold some water are not well suited since plants do not grow well under extremely dry conditions. They will grow in partially shaded areas, except blueberries, which require full sunlight.

The most suitable soil pH range is 6.0 to 7.5 for currants and gooseberries, 5.5 to 6.5 for elderberries, and 4.0 to 5.2 for blueberries. The organic matter content should be 3 to 4 percent.

Garden areas that have been tilled yearly may require only a regular seed preparation, especially if the soil is fertile. Areas where grass is growing should be plowed or tilled the summer or fall before planting. This will help to eliminate grass that might compete with fruit plants for moisture and nutrients. It will also help to eliminate soil insects that feed on roots of new plants.

The planting area to be prepared depends on the number of plants to be set out. Currants and gooseberries are planted 3 to 4 feet apart in rows 6 to 8 feet apart. Elderberries should be planted 6 to 8 feet apart in rows 8 to 10 feet apart, and blueberry plants should be spaced 4 to 6 feet apart in rows 6 feet apart (about 25 square feet per plant). In a landscape planting these fruit plants can be grouped rather than set in rows and still allow the same square foot area per plant.

A soil analysis will provide information on soil pH and phosphorus, potassium, and organic matter that may be needed. Information is available at county extension offices about collecting a soil sample and arranging for analysis.

Most Kansas soils are not sufficiently acidic for good blueberry production. To acidify soils for blueberries, incorporate sulfur at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet for each full point tested above 4.5. Or, if the soil pH is between about 5.2 and 6.2, make a mixture of one-half acid peat moss and one-half topsoil. Use this mixture in a 2-foot-diameter hole that has a depth of 12 inches. Where the soil pH is above 6.2, individual

plants can be grown in large containers such as half of a 50gallon drum. The drum should be clean so it is free of toxic materials, have drainage holes in the bottom, and be buried in a sunny area, with 1 to 2 inches of rim above the ground. Fill the tub with a combination of peat moss and soil so the pH is above 4.2.

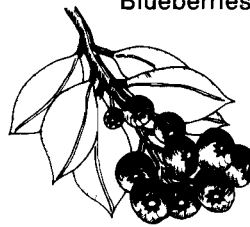
In the fall before planting thoroughly mix additional organic matter into the soil. Well rotted manure, hay, straw or ensilage, composted leaves, or grass clippings can be added to improve the soil. These materials can be worked into a 3 by 3 foot or 4 by 4 foot area, 6 to 8 inches deep, in the spot where plants will be set rather than throughout the entire planting area.

Irrigation will be necessary for good plant growth and fruit quality. Water may be applied by running a trickle from a garden hose around the plants, or by using the irrigation system already available for the garden or yard.

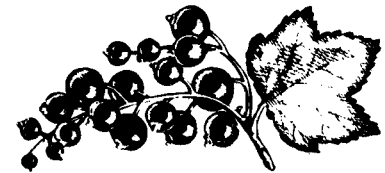
Cultivars

The cultivars listed include those observed to grow and produce satisfactorily in Kansas, or those readily available from nursery sources. Cultivars of currants and gooseberries are self-fruitful so cross-pollination is not necessary. Most elderberries and blueberries are self-sterile; two or more cultivars should be planted near each other for cross-pollination.

Blueberries



Currants



Gooseberries



Elderberries

Currants: Red Lake, Wilder.

Gooseberries: Pixwell, Poorman, Welcome.

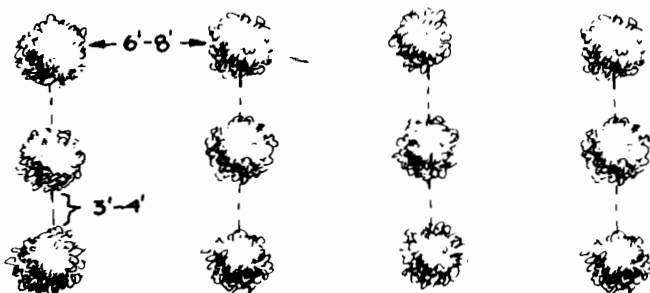
Elderberries: Adams #1 or #2, Johns.

Blueberries: Bluecrop, Blueray, Colville, Jersey, Herbert.

Planting and Care

Plant currants and gooseberries as early as possible in the spring. Both begin growth early and growing buds may be damaged during planting.

Vigorous, well rooted, 1-year-old plants are most likely to make good growth the year they are planted. Prune off damaged roots and cut the tops back to about 10 inches. Set the plants a little below the soil level to encourage a bush form to develop. Be certain roots do not dry out during planting. Carefully spread the roots and firm the soil or peat-soil mixture.



Currant and gooseberry plants should be spaced 3-4 feet apart, in rows 6-8 feet apart.

Mulches help to retain soil moisture, suppress weed growth, and keep soil cooler around the base of plants. Mulch materials may include old hay, straw or ensilage, composted leaves and grass clippings, wood chips or peat moss. The mulched area should be about 3 to 5 feet in diameter and about 3 to 6 inches thick. The more coarse the material, such as straw or wood chips, the thicker it should be applied.

Some mulch materials may also have fertilizer value. An annual application of about $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 bushel (4 to 6 inches deep) of well rotted, composted manure spread uniformly around each plant will add nutrients and function as a mulch.

If manure or composted material with fertilizer is not available and a soil sample has not been analyzed for plant nutrients, apply 6 to 8 ounces of a complete fer-

tilizer such as 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 analysis in a band around each plant. The fertilizer should be kept about a foot away from the base of the plant. An application can be made at planting, then repeated in March each year.

On blueberries, to avoid root burning, it is advisable not to fertilize when they are planted. If the planting site is fertile, extra fertilizer may not be necessary the first year. In weak soils, apply 2 ounces ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) of ammonium sulfate around each plant about 4 to 6 weeks after planting.

In late winter of the second year, apply another 2 ounces of ammonium sulfate per plant. Increase the amount until about 4 ounces is being applied annually on mature plants. Also, a complete fertilizer such as 13-13-13 can be applied at the rate of 8 ounces per plant for mature plants where growth is weak. The soil pH should be checked at least every other year to maintain the desired range.

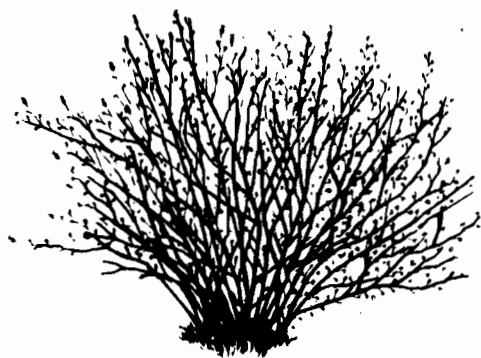
Pruning

Currants, gooseberries and elderberries should be pruned annually for good quality fruit to develop. Prune when the plants are dormant, usually in early to mid-March.

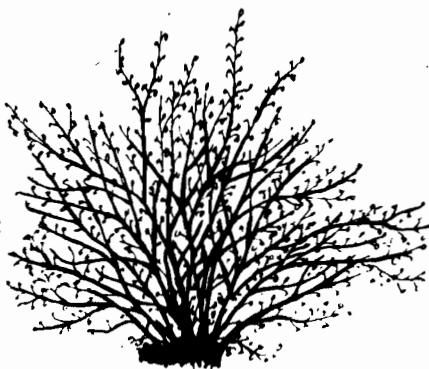
Currants and gooseberry plants develop fruit from buds at the base on 1-year-old wood and from spurs on older wood. The older wood becomes progressively less fruitful and canes older than 3 or 4 years usually are unproductive. Pruning consists mainly of selecting vigorous fruiting wood and thinning out older, weaker wood.

In the second year, remove the weaker shoots and leave six to eight strong branches. On mature plants, leave four to five 3-year-old branches, four to five 2-year-old branches and four to five branches from the past year's growth, giving a bush with 12 to 15 branches on each plant. Remove branches that tend to lie on the ground. Also, prune out weak branches in the center to keep the plant open to sunlight and air movement.

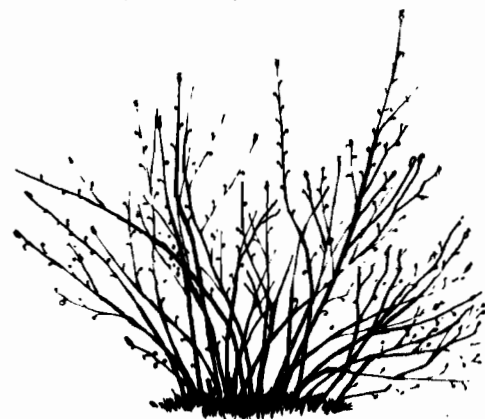
Elderberries, if healthy and vigorous, send up several new canes each year. These new canes do not have side shoots (laterals) the first year, but may bear single clusters on their terminals. Two-year-old canes are the



Currant plant before pruning.



Gooseberry plant before pruning.



Currant plant after pruning. Currants and gooseberries have similar growth and fruiting habits, so pruning is similar.

most fruitful since they produce several lateral branches. Fruit clusters are borne on the outer ends of the current season's growth. The older trunks of elderberries lose vigor and become weak after 2 or 3 years.

Little pruning is required on elderberries. All dead, broken and weak canes should be cut off at ground level before growth starts in the spring. An equal number (2 or 3) of 1-, 2- and 3-year old canes may be left. Canes older than 3 years should be removed to encourage growth of new, more fruitful canes.

Blueberries generally do not need to be pruned until the third year after planting. In late winter, remove spreading canes and dead branches. As the plants come into regular bearing in about 5 years, all but six to eight of the most vigorous canes should be removed in the annual dormant pruning. Older canes that lack vigor plus dead and damaged wood and weak young canes should be pruned out. Head back excessive growth so fruit weight does not cause branches to rest on the ground.

Harvesting

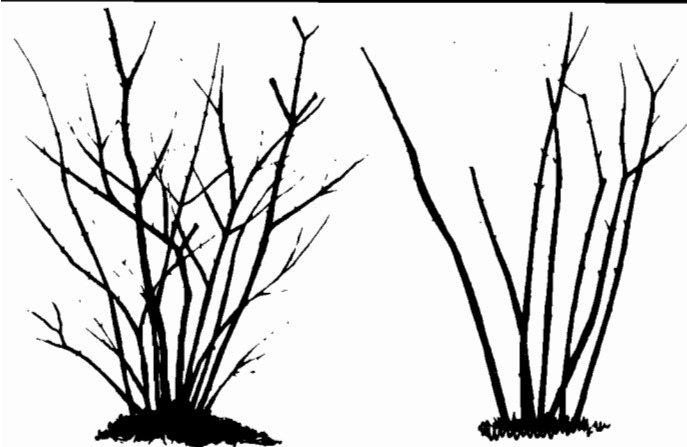
Ease of fruit separation and development of the "mature" color and flavor are generally the most reliable guides for fruit harvest. Unlike most fruits, currants, gooseberries, and blueberries may be left on the bush for a week or more after they reach picking maturity. These fruits can be held for several weeks in refrigerated storage. They should be handled carefully, to avoid bruising the fruit. Gooseberries sunscald easily so picking them as they mature and placing them in the shade immediately is advisable.

Elderberries ripen unevenly over a period of about 2 weeks. The fruits are easy to pick when they reach a dark purple color. Uncooked berries have a dark purple juice and are sour and inedible. The berries are cooked, then juice extracted, or the berries may be frozen, then thawed and processed later.

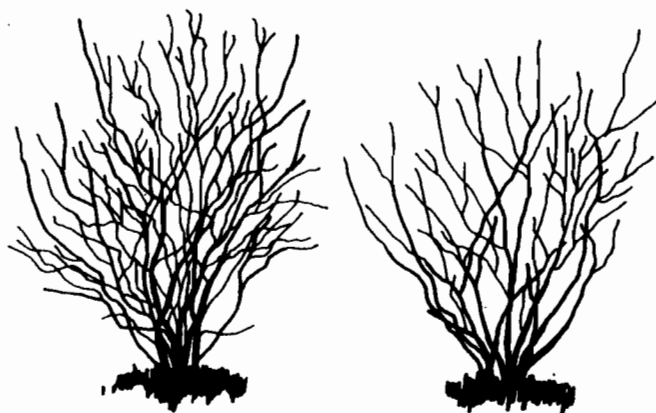
Pest Control

Good growing practices, including annual pruning, fertilizing as needed, and keeping plants from moisture stress, are important in preventing pest problems. Infected and damaged plants should be pruned out and removed from the growing area. Generally, a minimal spray program is required by currants, gooseberries and elderberries.

Plants affected	Pest	Control measure
Currants, gooseberries	Aphids, scale	Dormant oil; just before swell.
Currants, gooseberries	Cane borer, aphids	All-purpose fruit spray as full foliage first develops and about 2 weeks after full bloom.
Gooseberries	Anthracnose	Liquid lime sulfur or captan as leaves first begin to unfold.
Gooseberries, elderberries	Powdery mildew	Control generally not needed; Benlate if problem becomes severe.
Currants, elderberries, blueberries	Birds	Cover with netting so birds cannot fly under edges.
Blueberries	Rabbits	Screen around individual plants, or fence planting.



Elderberry plant before and after pruning.



Blueberry plant before and after pruning.

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

MF-719

May 1984

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5-84-15M

File Code: Horticulture and Landscaping—2