

Chuckleberry Feedback October 2014

In October 2014 we asked our customers for their feedback on their Chuckleberry bushes purchased from us since 2012. We specifically asked for information on where in the garden they were planted and the soil type, how people felt their bushes had done in terms of growth and fruit, and what people had made with the fruit they harvested.



Location and Soil Type

The majority of those planting the chuckleberry in full sun or semi-shade and in a slightly sheltered location appear to have had the most success with growth and fruit, as did two people who planted their bush in a pot. One gardener reported no fruit at all from a bush on a North-facing, wind-swept hillside.

The soil conditions suggest that the bush likes a well drained soil, though soil types range from heavy clay to loam, acid to alkali. Most people added compost or a good mulch, and they appear to be trouble-free to grow. Interestingly one gardener in Powys has been very impressed with the bushes despite being planted in wet, poorly drained, clay soil. A gardener in the Rhondda was unsuccessful with his bushes which were planted in humus-rich acid soil in part shade.

Vigour and Comparison with other Fruit Bushes

Gardeners who have planted their Chuckleberries alongside existing fruit bushes have been able to give useful feedback as they can make a direct comparison. The majority of those who can compare have done so favourably. In Cornwall they have compared "exceptionally well". Those experienced gardeners with one-year-old bushes anticipate the cropping will increase with age. Several people noticed they were bigger than blackcurrants, with a superior flavour.

What has been made with the fruit

Chuckleberries are reported to have a similar flavour to a blackcurrant, though more interesting, and, whilst tart, they are sweet too. One person commented that they are superior to blackcurrants in size and flavour. The fact that people were happy to eat them raw indicates a good flavour, with one person saying they were delicious straight from the bush.

Our feedback shows that the chuckleberries have been made into ice-creams, fruit pies and crumbles, fruit salads, mixed with yoghurt, purees, jams, jellies, cordials, coulis, summer puddings, smoothies, fruit fools, cheesecakes. Some people ate the fruit straight from the bush or added raw berries to breakfast muesli. We are also told separately that the cordial makes a great mixer in cocktails!

Full Comments including the region of the UK

Our Chuckleberry is going strong. It is planted in a sunny position and our soil is very chalky. It is planted near some Gooseberries and has probably grown more vigorously. We have made Chuckleberry ice cream and mixed berries with apple and rhubarb crumbles.

Berkshire

It's in our allotment, in a sunny position, but on very clay soil, and with a lot of couch grass... It's growing well, but no fruit this year (as expected).

Bristol

My chuckleberry is growing in a sunny position that is semi-shaded from late afternoon by a willow tree in a neighbour's garden. Soil is a medium loam, well drained, but apt to become dry if no rainfall for a week or so. It grows as part of an informal planting with other gooseberries, jostaberries and other blackcurrants. Chuckleberry is as vigorous as jostaberry and cassis, with a slightly more upright habit and less random branching than jostaberry. It produces plenty of fruit, which to my palette (so subjective!) errs more towards a blackcurrant flavour, than the jostaberries that I have. Fruit size is also comparable. This said you can eat them fresh straight from the bush. I eat them fresh, as well as use them in fruit salads and in yoghurt. They are also good for making puree and jams. People always laugh when I mention the name chuckleberry - so a good choice from that perspective!

Cambridgeshire

I have been exceptionally pleased with the 'chuckle sisters' this year. Last year I moved them from my vegetable garden to my new fruit garden (formerly a chicken paddock). They have done really well. The soil is clay and full of slate; I am not too far from the Delabole Slate Quarry. The soil is, of course, very fertile in its own right but more so with five years of chicken poo in/on it!! Their current home is sunny and now has a bit of shelter; but if the wind decides to blow off Bodmin Moor (nothing between us and the moors, other than a few miles across the valley) or the Atlantic, they do get a buffeting; however they seem to stand up well to our exposed situation. The bushes have fared exceptionally well compared to the blackcurrant, redcurrant, whitecurrant and the 'goosegog' bushes. They don't seem to suffer with pests and the birds tend to leave them be. They have grown really well since I have had them, despite being moved last year, and are very sturdy bushes. I have made jellies, jams, ice creams, coulis, cordials and puddings with them, plus I also used some in fruit smoothies. Unfortunately not enough produced for me to freeze any for winter!! More bushes required, I think!

Cornwall

OMG what a cropper! Fab fruit - so glad I purchased this! What a memorial to your Mum!

Cornwall

We planted the chuckleberry on our allotment (in a fruit cage), in full sun (south facing), the soil has a ph of 6.5. It has more than doubled in size, whilst still fairly compact and bushy. It has grown as quickly as our blackcurrant bushes. The fruit are of a good size - bigger than most blackcurrants, we made cordial, jam and ice-cream, also used in fruit pies. The fruit has a more interesting flavour than a blackcurrant, whilst tart it does have a sweetness to it.
Cornwall

My three Chuckleberries were planted in a large raised bed (950 feet up on a south-facing slope of Dartmoor), partly because I didn't have any other suitable space cleared for them! The bed gets quite a lot of sun, but shaded early and late by surrounding trees. The soil is mainly garden compost (our garden is fairly acid, and drains quickly) with a good load of well-composted horse manure. They've done really well – I got about 3lbs off two bushes, which I ate as they were (lovely and sweet) but the blackbird stripped the third overnight (so he obviously thought they were lovely too!). The berries were huge and the bushes seem to be thriving. I did offer berries to a friend, and we spent quite some time debating exactly what they tasted of – but they were popular.

Devon

We loved the chuckleberries! We have only harvested from the first batch of 6 bushes, the second batch of 66 will fruit next year. Our soil is a clay loam, ph6.5. The bushes are in full sun and yielded about 2kg of fruit each, the heaviest fruiters we had by a long chalk. We made chuckleberry and blackcurrant jelly this year (delicious), and used them in a mixed fruit crumble and fruit fool. We will be making 'Hannah's chuckleberry jelly' next year as a social enterprise with our disabled adult service users and selling it on site and perhaps in one or two local retailers if we have enough. People love the name as well as the fruit.
Devon

Our Chuckleberry is doing well this year. It is growing well however we have not had any fruit this year, as expected. The site it is on is a wind swept hillside which is north facing. It is surrounded by a variety of other fruit bushes.

Devon

We bought rather a lot of Chuckleberries from you and I can tell you that they enjoy the Devon soil and climate. They are positioned in the fruit cage which is in full sun. Compared to the black and red currants it has been growing at a similar rate, producing a very good crop of berries. Didn't get around to making any jam this year but they were great in summer pudding. Everybody loves the name Chuckleberry.
Devon

Did really well, very vigorous - more so than blackcurrants - resisted snail attacks well. I've had to relocate it to my allotment as we had modifications to garden and no room for fruit in garden.

Hampshire

I planted it in reclaimed imported soil, used to raise the level of the original plot, which was heavy, stony clay. the roots were well surrounded with plenty of compost, growmore applied early in the year and plant was in a slightly shaded area. It grew to about a meter tall and produce a reasonable amount of nice fruit, which I added to my breakfast muesli. I have a lot of soft fruit, which crop a lot heavier with age, so ask me again next year.
Hampshire

I was so impressed with the one I bought from you that I bought two more the following year. They are planted in J.I No3 in 35 Ltr pots, they are given periodic liquid feeds with seaweed based Tomato feed, they have been trouble-free to grow; they are grown in semi shade. Cropping has been outstanding, so much so I gave away my Red Currant bushes as I had enough fruit from the Chuckleberries, I've mixed them with other fruits when my wife makes crumbles but mostly they eaten raw with ice cream.
Lancashire

I put the chuckleberry in a large tub, it was against a fence near the house at a spot which got a great deal of sunlight. My back garden is almost North facing, but there are fields to the back so there is little shade. I also put in currant and gooseberry bushes in the large tubs, all against the same fence. All the bushes grew less well in the tubs, the chuckleberry grew as well as the blackcurrant and better than the redcurrant. The fruit I did get from the chuckleberry was very good, we just ate them raw. But I think better in the soil than in a tub.
Lancashire

The bush has been planted in our fruit area of the garden which gets plenty of sun but we are on very heavy clay soil. I added compost and grit to the planting hole. The bush has been quite vigorous and is now well established, growing as well as black and red currants and gooseberries. We made fruit pies with the fruit this year. Last year the amount was insufficient to be used alone so it went in with the blackcurrants into jam. We enjoyed the fruit pies.
Northumberland

Our two chuckleberry bushes performed very well, despite the challenge of where we live. We are 1100 feet high in the middle of rural common land, and therefore have a shorter season than most. Our ground is mostly clay with a small layer of topsoil that had been previously trampled into a bog by sheep. The ground is very wet with little drainage. We sectioned off an area for a fruit cage and into this we planted our chuckleberries. The area has an open aspect and in an area that is the most sheltered on our plot. The chuckleberries didn't seem to mind the poor conditions and have gone from strength to strength, as have our currant bushes. We had a good crop of chuckleberries this year, and they ripened before the blackcurrants, which gave a succession harvest. I have made a chuckleberry pie, and a chuckleberry cheesecake, and visitors didn't realise and thought it was blackcurrants until I told them. The rest of the crop has gone into the freezer to use throughout the winter.
Powys

I was very pleased with my Chuckleberry this year, lots of fruit but I did not think to weigh it! I made fruit fool and ice cream, both very good! I have it planted in a large pot in multi-purpose compost, on a south facing patio, not in full sun. I think it has doubled in size since I received it. I only have a gooseberry bush to keep it company and they seem to have progressed in size and vigour much the same.

Powys

My two plants were planted in humus rich acid soil in part shade. They made very little growth and the crop was less than 300 grams. I also found the taste like a milder blackcurrant. I think the situation in which I planted them was not suitable and consequently I have given the plants to a friend who has an allotment where the aspect is different.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

We bought two bushes and planted them close to a red currant, blackcurrant bush and a dessert gooseberry in a walk-in fruit cage. The site is in full sun until about 5.00pm in summer when it is in shade. The soil is dryish light neutral having grown good crops of currants, gooseberries and strawberries. It has my garden compost each year. The two bushes grew well but being small gave less fruit than their older neighbours. The fruits looked like slightly bigger blackcurrants and tasted similar to blackcurrants. Our blackcurrant had a bad attack of blackfly which did not happen to the chuckleberry, which was interesting. We ate most of the small amount of first year fruit but have frozen the rest with our blackberries for winter use. Overall we were disappointed it was not more different from our blackcurrants but were interested it seemed resistant to the nearby blackfly infestation.

Shropshire

I only bought one bush as a novelty – couldn't resist the name! I planted the chuckleberry in the centre of a walled garden in a sunny but sheltered position. The soil is good loam although I didn't add anything at the time of planting. The bush has put on strong growth this year – not as vigorous as the redcurrants I bought from you which I composted generously. There were some berries, but not too many. They were all eaten straight from the bush and were delicious. I would use them in puddings and jam.

Shropshire

I am thrilled with our Chuckleberry bushes. They are two years old and we took our first harvest this summer. We have used them in pies and crumbles and they have been devoured by our Wwoofers almost as they have come out of the oven! Delicious and such neat little shrubs in our Forest Garden. We are a Permaculture LAND Centre and I tell all our visitors about them, so hope you have got lots of stock because I definitely want to plant some more. We have heavy clay, loam soil and they are in full sun in our Forest Garden – that may change as trees grow around them but they will be well established by then and they are very well-mulched. We grow blackcurrants very well which is why I ventured to try Chuckleberries. The chuckleberries are superior to the blackcurrants in terms of flavour and size. They also do not require as much sugar which is a big plus for me.

Somerset

My chuckleberry is planted between a small apple tree and a rhubarb. This is in full sun in midsummer but partially shaded in Spring and Autumn. Soil slightly alkaline.

It has grown well and compares well with other first year bushes. There was not enough fruit to make anything so ate them raw. I bought them because my friend down the road made a lovely crumble with them last year.

Somerset

When I had my Chuckleberry in 2013 the ground was frozen and I was unable to put it in the ground. So I put it in a fairly large pot and put it in the greenhouse and then on to the patio there it has stayed. This year it has had a huge crop; I have put some into a pie and the rest into mixed fruit jam. When I ordered it I could only afford one plant but I am very pleased with it. Now it is dormant I am going to put it into a much larger pot as it seems happy on the patio.

West Midlands

Six chuckleberries were planted in a certified organic walled garden at a National Trust Property – Hanbury Hall. The soil is clay/loam and it is in full sun. We had a small crop in 2013 which impressed me. In 2014 we harvested 3.25kg in June and 6kg in July. We follow a winter pruning regime (pruning as for blackcurrants). I have found this to be fine and has helped to increase the vigour and health of the plants.

I also make sure that we apply a mulch of garden compost in a circle around the base of the plant to add nutrients and moisture retention. It is just as strong in vigour as the other soft fruit that we grow, without being over-vigorous. I was attracted to the Chuckleberry due to the combination of fruits in its make-up and also to your guarantee that it would make good ice-cream. The name had an added attraction too – who wouldn't be attracted to and smile at 'Chuckleberry Ice Cream' when reading a sales board? It is available to buy at the property as ice cream. I thought that it would be a great addition to our other bespoke flavours. The ice cream is used specifically and only at Hanbury Hall. Our catering team really, really liked it. They have to scoop all the ice cream and the Chuckleberry is the easiest out of all the flavours to scoop (something to do with the pectin amount I think). We also sold some fresh fruit direct to visitors from our produce stall in the Walled Garden. We also had it available to buy as ice cream at a large event we ran in July called Flower Feast and it was very popular.

Worcestershire

Thank You

We thank you for all your comments which affirm our belief in the versatile fruit of the chuckleberry. A percentage of the purchase price goes to Macmillan Cancer Support, and so far you have helped us to donate over £900 to this excellent charity. Welsh Fruit Stocks hope you continue to enjoy the benefits of the fruit for many years.