

Welsh Fruit Stocks Blackcurrant Growing Guide



Blackcurrant bushes are of the genus *Ribes*. They are a woody bush, with fairly straight shoots, growing on the growth from the previous year and also sending up new shoots from the base of the bush (the stool). The fruit is produced on the wood from the previous year, so the bush should not be cut down each year, but pruned to remove older growth and to maintain fruit production.

We grow blackcurrant cuttings for the Ribena growers, so we have fields of blackcurrant stool beds which are cut down each year and divided up into cuttings for despatch all over the country. The bushes we sell to gardeners are grown from our own PHPS certified cuttings. We plant these ourselves and grow them on throughout the summer, ready for despatch as one-year-old bushes when they are dormant between November and March/April.

Planting

Location and Soil

Blackcurrant bushes will do well in most soils, but particularly enjoy a deep medium/heavy loamy soil, as they are quite deep rooting. They also like a sheltered site.

Preparation

Prepare the soil a month or so in advance of planting your blackcurrant bushes. Incorporate some well-rotted compost into soil, and dig in to at least a spade's depth. Prepare an area large enough to allow your bushes to be planted 4-5' (1.2-1.5m) apart. Fertiliser may also be beneficial.

Planting Method

Dig the hole big enough to accept the roots without bunching or curling. Blackcurrant bushes should be planted quite deep, about 2" (5cm) deeper than the previous soil level on the bush, or covering the first two buds on the stem. This is to encourage the bushes to develop as a stool, with shoots being produced just below ground level. Firm in well to ensure that there is no air around the roots.

Fruiting and Cropping

Pruning and Care

After planting, cut the shoots down to leave about two buds above ground level to encourage a strong root system to develop. Do not cut away any shoots the following winter. Blackcurrants only fruit on wood produced the previous year so don't expect fruit in the first year. In the third or fourth winter, cut some of the old wood out of the bush and any crossing or crowded shoots, to make room for new shoots the following year. As a general rule, it is best to cut out a third of the old wood each year, making the cut as close to the soil level as possible.

Pollination

Blackcurrant bushes are self-pollinating, so only one bush is needed. Ensure insects can access your bushes at flowering time to aid pollination.

Fruit Protection

Birds and small mammals also like blackcurrants. Try some bird scarers or netting to keep the birds off, or a fruit cage. The more modern varieties are later flowering, so are less at risk from late frosts, but should a frost occur when they are in flower some protection will be necessary.

Pests and Disease

The main insect pests of blackcurrant bushes are aphids, gall mite, leaf curling midge and sawfly. Gall mite causes the swollen bud of 'Big Bug' which carries the reversion virus and this severely affects the fruiting

potential of the bush. If found, any large rounded buds should be removed in the late winter to help control the mites. Leaf curling midge will cause the top leaf of the shoot to twist and curl. If you see this in early summer it is best to pinch off the leaf and destroy the small larvae inside. Most modern varieties have good resistance to foliar diseases. We find garlic sprays help reduce insect problems.

Feeding and Watering

Keep the bushes watered in dry weather, especially during establishment or if they are planted in light or shallow soils, and control any weed growth around the bushes to prevent competition for water. Mulch the ground around the bushes annually to provide nutrients, prevent drying out, and to help control the weeds. A liquid foliar feed can be beneficial after fruiting.