

Welsh Fruit Stocks Chuckleberry Growing Guide



The Chuckleberry is a new and very exciting addition to our fruit family, bred by Chas Welch in Norfolk who crossed a redcurrant with a gooseberry and Jostaberry (itself a hybrid of a gooseberry and blackcurrant).

The result is a high yielding blackcurrant-like bush - compact, 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 mainly 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.

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

Research we carried out in 2014 showed that 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 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.

Chuckleberries will do well in most soils, but particularly enjoy a deep medium/heavy loamy soil, as they are quite deep rooting.

Preparation

Prepare the soil a month or so in advance of planting your Chuckleberry 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. Chuckleberry bushes can also be grown on a short leg (see Gooseberry bushes), or as a stool (see Blackcurrant bushes) if planting a one-year-old bush. The branches of two-year-old bushes should be trimmed back to 3-4 buds, but leave one full branch to get a taste of fruit in their first summer. All the bushes should be firmed well in and watered. If it is very dry, continue to water until established.

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. Chuckleberries mainly fruit on wood produced the previous year so don't expect much 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

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

Fruit Protection

Leave the fruit to ripen well before picking. Birds and small mammals also like Chuckleberries, especially when the berries are fully ripe. Try some bird scarers or netting to keep the birds off, or a fruit cage. Should a frost occur when they are in flower some protection will be necessary.

Pests and Disease

The main insect pests of Chuckleberry 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. 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, especially as they are such prolific fruiters.