



Growing the Gooseberry

Gooseberries are hardy and easy to grow. A few plants will produce enough fruit for typical family use, especially pies and preserves.

Gooseberries prefer a cool climate and a rich, moist, but well-drained soil high in organic matter. Avoid planting where water stands, or in hot dry areas. Gooseberries blossom early in the spring, so should not be planted on low lands or in pockets where late spring frost may injure the blossoms. The fruit of the gooseberry often scalds badly in hot weather, especially when exposed to direct sun. They thrive best when planted on a northern exposure, where they will be shaded part of the day. Gooseberries are subject to mildew, so plant them where the air circulation is good.

Prepare the soil thoroughly before planting. For vigorous growth the first season, turn under and thoroughly mix liberal amounts of organic matter in the form of well-rotted manure, compost, or green manure crops. Peat moss can be used in small plantings.

Plant vigorous, well-rooted 1-year-old or two-year-old plants. Space plants 4-5 feet apart in each direction. Unlike bare-root stock, which should be planted in early spring or late fall, the gooseberries at Garden Gate Greenhouse, Inc. are already potted and rooted. As a general rule, containerized plants may be planted throughout the growing season. Set them in the bed at the same depth as they were growing in the pot.

If you cannot use well-aged manure for fertilizer, use commercial fertilizers to supply nutrients. Apply 1/4 to 1/3 lb. of 12-12-12 per bush annually. Make application either in the fall after growth stops or in early spring before growth begins. Watch for competition from trees. Growing conditions are satisfactory if growth is vigorous (new crown shoots from 15-20" long), if the plants are productive, and if the foliage is a dark, healthy green.

Prune when the plants are dormant in the late winter or very early in the spring before growth begins. The plants bear some fruit near the base of 1-year-old wood and produce the most and best fruit on spurs of 2- and 3-year old canes. At the end of the third year, you want 3 or 4 canes each of 1-, 2-, and 3-year old wood. This will make a total of 9-12 canes on each plant. Canes 4 years and older produce very little fruit and should be cut off at ground level. If properly pruned, a dormant bush will have 6-10 bearing canes plus 3 or 4 new ones coming along to replace the oldest each year.

Wear leather gloves to pick gooseberries because of plant thorns. For pies, jellies, and jams, pick them at their fullest size, but before they turn reddish-brown and become completely ripe.

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