



23 November 2018, written by Benedict Vanheems

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I'm often asked "What's the best fruit bush for beginners?" Well, one stands head and shoulders above the rest: the gorgeous gooseberry. Gooseberry bushes grow well in most soils; they're self-pollinating so you can get away with planting just one; they're easy to prune; and gooseberries are very generous, giving up their sumptuous fruits in hearty profusion. In short, you really need to grow one! Here's how...

Growing Gooseberries from Planting to Harvest



Types of Gooseberry

Choose from either culinary or dessert varieties. Culinary gooseberries are usually cooked with sugar to temper their naturally sour taste. They're perfect in jams, pies, puddings and – my favorite – a gooseberry fool.

Dessert varieties are sweet enough to eat straight from the bush – a treat you're unlikely to experience unless you grow your own. Pick some berries young for cooking then leave the remainder to mature to full sweetness.

The berries themselves are typically pale green, but look out for eye-catching red or yellow varieties too. Most plants are very thorny, but some varieties are easier on the hands with considerably fewer thorns.



Red gooseberries are available as well as green and yellow varieties

Where to Grow Gooseberries

Gooseberries will thrive in most gardens, but to get the most from them grow them in a bright
<https://www.growveg.com/guides/growing-gooseberries-from-planting-to-harvest/#:~:text=How to Plant a Gooseberry,manure to the excavated soil.>

Gooseberries will thrive in most gardens, but to get the most from them grow them in a bright position in rich, well-drained soil.

Gooseberries naturally grow into bushes but may also be trained – as standards on a long single trunk, or against a fence as fans or single-stemmed cordons. Take heart if you really don't have much space to spare or you only have a patio, because this hardy fruit can successfully be grown in containers too.

(Please note that in a few areas of the United States growing gooseberries is prohibited because they can serve as a host to white pine blister rust, a disease devastating to the lumber industry. Check for local restrictions before sourcing plants.)



Mulch gooseberries to suppress weeds and feed the plant

How to Plant a Gooseberry Bush

Plant bare-root or container-grown gooseberries from late fall to early spring – you'll probably need to wait until spring if the ground freezes solid over winter where you garden.

Dig a generous planting hole then add some well-rotted compost or manure to the excavated soil. Place the gooseberry into the hole so that the previous soil level is flush with the new soil level. Feed back the enriched soil around the roots or rootball, taking plenty of time to firm in the soil as you fill to anchor the roots. Water copiously to settle the soil further then finish off with a mulch of organic material to help suppress weeds and feed your new plant.

If you're planting more than one gooseberry, space bushes at least 4ft (120cm) apart. Cordons can be planted much closer – just 45cm (18in) apart – but tie the stem to a supporting bamboo cane that's in turn secured to horizontal wire supports.



Cordon-training gooseberries enables plants to be grown closer together, so you can pack more varieties in

Caring for Gooseberries

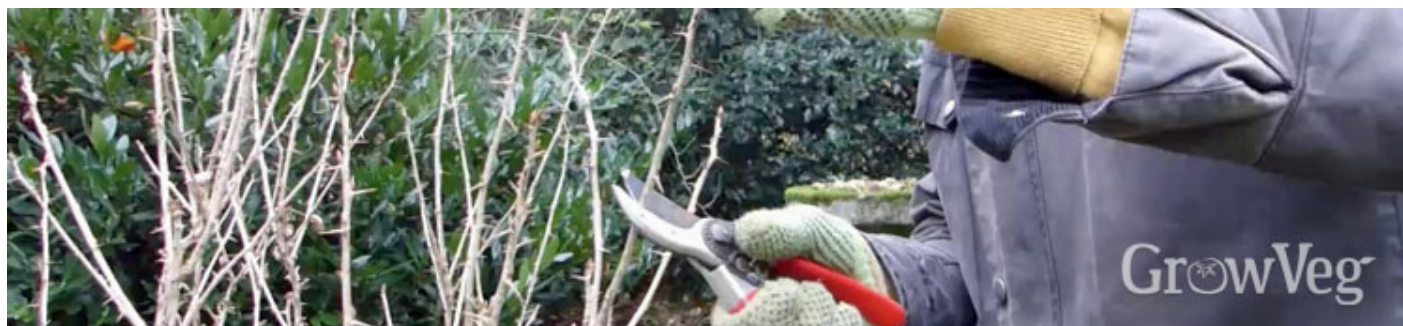
In moisture-retentive soils established bushes need very little additional watering, but regular watering in hot, dry weather is a must for young plants and essential for container-grown gooseberries.

Apply an organic, balanced fertilizer at the end of each winter to give plants a good start ahead of the new growing season. Then remove any weeds around the root area before topping up mulches to at least an inch or 3cm deep. Use organic materials like garden compost or bark chippings for this.

Pruning Gooseberry Bushes

Prune established gooseberry bushes to encourage an open, evenly spaced branch structure. This will let in plenty of light while allowing for good air circulation to discourage disease.





Prune the previous season's growth back by a half to keep gooseberry bushes productive

Most pruning is completed in winter when the bush is dormant. To start, cut out all dead or diseased wood, any shoots growing close to the ground, plus tangled or overcrowded branches. Now prune the branches that are left by cutting back the previous season's growth by a half. Sideshoots coming off the main branches should be cut back to between one and three buds from the base of the shoot. Make all cuts just above an outward facing bud to encourage that all-important open habit. Finally, dig up any stems, called suckers, growing from the ground away from the main stem.

Harvesting Gooseberries

Birds can sometimes pilfer fruits before you've had a chance to pick them. Stop them in their tracks! Cover plants with netting or grow bushes inside a purpose-made fruit cage.



Harvest gooseberries with care to avoid their thorns

Gooseberries are ready to pick from early summer onwards. Harvesting dessert or dual-purpose varieties in stages gives early, under-ripe fruits for cooking, then later fruits to enjoy sweet and fresh. The berries that remain after the first pickings will also be able to grow larger.

Handle the soft, plump fruits gently and wear thick gloves if the thorns become too painful to bear!

Gooseberries are at their mouth-watering best immediately after picking, but they'll stay fresh enough in polythene bags kept in the refrigerator for up to a week. Or freeze gluts for a well-deserved taste of summer later on in the year.

Give gooseberries a go! They're reliable, hard-working fruits that deserve to be more widely grown. If you're lucky enough to grow gooseberries already and have a variety you'd especially recommend, please share it in the comments section below; and don't forget to share your other tips for success while you're at it.

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