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Ribes Cultivar Review 2003

The following are descriptions of common varieties of currants and gooseberries suitable to New York conditions. It's also available online at: <http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/ribescult2003.html>

The regulation on growing ribes species in New York was revised in 2003. New York residents can now legally grow red currants, gooseberries and cultivars of black currants that are immune or resistant to white pine blister rust throughout New York State. In the near future, the establishment of fruiting currant districts will allow some regions to grow any of the black currant cultivars. Contact Steve McKay (sam44@cornell.edu), Cornell Cooperative Extension Educator in Hudson Valley, for further details on the establishment of fruiting districts. See also Cornell's white pine blister rust factsheet: <http://plantclinic.cornell.edu/FactSheets/wpineblister/wpineblister.htm>

Black Currants:

Ben Alder (U.S. Plant Patent # 9,889) is susceptible to white pine blister rust but resistance to mildew is very high. It is high yielding variety with superior juice quality. Growth habit is compact and upright and the fruit is well presented for machine harvesting. Bushes are vigorous though height varies according to climate but grows to about 4 feet tall. The plant flowers late so escapes damage by late spring frost. Harvest dates are late July to early August.

Ben Lomond (Scandinavia, 1972) is susceptible to white pine blister rust and though generally resistant to mildew, in some regions resistance has broken down. This mid-season variety is known for its frost tolerance during flowering, even ripening, high yields, large fruit, long hang time and very high Vitamin C content. The berries are large and firm. It forms a compact spreading bush that reaches about 4 ½ feet.

Ben Sarek (Scandinavia, 1984) is resistant to white pine blister rust. Its compact bush size, productivity, very large fruit and ease of hand harvest are its prized features. It flowers and ripens about 7 days earlier than Ben Lomond with high tolerance for frost and cold injury. It forms a compact bush of medium vigor which rarely exceeds one meter 3 feet in height.

Titania (US Plant Patent No. 11,439) is immune to white pine blister rust and has good resistance to powdery mildew. Fruit size is large, similar to Ben Lomond, fruit quality is good and yields are high.

Flowering and ripening seasons are very similar to Ben Lomond. The plant is very vigorous - reaching heights of 6 feet. Titania reaches full maturity in three seasons as opposed to four or five with most other popular varieties.

Red, White, and Pink Currants:

Jonkheer van Tets (Holland, 1941) is a very popular early season red variety with excellent flavor. It is very productive but its growth habit is untidy and it is best grown as cordon. Early flowering makes it more susceptible to frost damage. Gray mold may be a problem in wet seasons.

Red Lake (Minnesota Fruit Breeding Farm, 1920) is one of the most popular red varieties grown in North America, however, it is quite susceptible to mildew, and it does not have much tolerance to late spring frost. The bushes are vigorous and it produces large long clusters of berries that are easy to pick. Fruit size is very large and of good quality with high juice content. The fruit ripens in mid-season and produces high yields of firm fruit.

Rovada (Holland, 1990) is a red cultivar that is very resistant to mildew and other leaf diseases. Late flowering helps it avoid frost damage. It produces a heavy crop of very large fruit with nice aroma on extremely long strigs.

Tatran (Slovakia, 1985) a white currant that is late-ripening, with exceptionally long clusters. It is very winter-hardy.

HRON (Slovakia) is a red cultivar that is extremely vigorous and has a very attractive upright growth habit, leaves are dark green which contributes to ornamental value, good resistance to foliar diseases, adapts well to variable climate conditions, particularly well suited to higher elevations, high degree of tolerance to late spring frost, very long clusters of bright red fruit.

Blanka (Slovakia) is very reliable and easy to grow. It has very heavy yields, good shelf life, very long clusters and some resistance to spring frost as it flowers mid-spring. It is very vigorous with a somewhat spreading growth habit. The fruit is large, opaque, off-white. It has attractive green and red foliage.

Primus (Slovakia) berries are translucent, white with a yellow cast and good flavor. The growth habit is upright and vigorous. Yields are high but not as spectacular as Blanka. Frost may be a problem as flowering takes place earlier than Blanka and berries, strigs, and plant height are smaller. It is a very attractive plant as the leaves have an appealing red cast and new shoots are fully red.

Pink Champagne has beautiful translucent pink fruit of good quality and flavor. It is best suited for home gardens as it is easy to grow but not a terrific yielder. It has a vigorous upright growth habit and is resistant to leaf diseases.

Gooseberries:

Caprivator is a cross of American and European cultivars and is resistant to powdery mildew. It has red teardrop-shaped fruit and is nearly thornless.

Hinnonmaki Red (Finland) has outstanding flavor, good mildew resistance and is a favorite with home gardeners. Outer skin is tangy while the flesh is sweet. Very productive with dark red medium sized fruit on upright plants. It is very adaptable to various growing systems.

Invicta (U.K) produces a vigorous, rather spreading bush though with large and numerous spines. It is high yielding and, mildew resistant. It produces pale green fruit which is a good choice for fresh market outlets. Yields are very heavy and fruit size is large. It is suitable for processing, giving a product of high quality, even color and good flavor. It requires good soil drainage.

Poorman is one of the largest of the American cultivars and great for home gardeners. It is productive and vigorous, with medium-sized but high quality fruit.

Tixia™ (Rafz Switerland, 1990) has large (similar to Invicta), bright red fruit; elongated and quite smooth that ripens mid-season. In addition to the attractive fruit, Tixia one year shoots have few thorns and the thorns are relatively soft; usually as single thorns with very few, if any, on the upper part of shoots. Growth is medium to strong, upright.