

Ribes nigrum

[Synonyms : *Botrycarpum nigrum*, *Grossularia nigra*, *Ribes cyathiforme*, *Ribes nigrum* var. *europaeum*, *Ribes nigrum* var. *pauciflorum*, *Ribes olidum*, *Ribes pauciflorum*]

BLACK CURRANT is a deciduous shrub. Native to western Asia and to central and northern Europe, it has small greenish-white or greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Ahlbeere* (German), *Blackberry*, *Casis* (Spanish), *Cassis* (French), *Currant*, *European black currant*, *Gazel*, *Gradiles* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Groselheira-negra* (Portuguese), *Meruzalka černá* (Czech), *Mustaherukka* (Finnish), *Nabar* (Punjabi), *Nères gradilles* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Quinsy berry*, *Rhyfon Duon* (Welsh), *Ribes nero* (Italian), *Ríbezľa čierna* (Slovak), *Rybíz černý* (Czech), *Schwarze Johannisbeere* (German), *Squinancy berry*, *Svarta vinbär* (Swedish), *Svart vinbär* (Swedish), *Tistron* (Swedish), and *Wineberry*; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ‘you please all’ (branch of currants), and ‘your frown will kill me’.

There are several cultivated varieties of black currant with variations in taste, and in the colour of the flowers and in the fruit.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

Unless black currant plants are a variety that does not host the blister rust fungus they are prohibited in States in the United States where white pine (*Pinus strobus*) is a commercial timber tree.

Nigrum means ‘black’ with reference to the fruit.

Some of the common names reflect the fruit’s past use in remedies for easing sore throats (which were often referred to then as squinancy or quinsy).

The strong-smelling leaves are a particular delicacy for goats, and bears are said to enjoy the fruit. The latter are also extremely popular with birds.

A yellow dye can be obtained from the leaves and the fruit yield blue and violet dyes.

In the home the fruit have long been prized as an ingredient in jams, jellies and syrups.

The sour-smelling and aromatic-tasting, purplish-black berries have been used to make various drinks. They have been steeped in brandy and made into wine (particularly in Russia) or spirits eg. the French liqueur *cassis*. Then in Britain during World War II children received Vitamin C in commercially bottled black currant syrup that has continued in popularity there to the present day.

In Siberia the young leaves have been used to make an alcoholic drink and they can also be infused for a green tea and can be added to black or Indian tea (that for some improves its flavour markedly). In France they are the prime ingredient in the national liqueur *cassis* and are also used to manufacture jams and preserves.

Black currant is thought to have been introduced to North America by the early European settlers probably in the 16th Century.

The plant’s therapeutic properties have been applied to veterinary medicine particularly for fevers in cattle.

Black currant has been used in folk medicine, especially for colds and throat infections (and also in the treatment of gout, rheumatism and diarrhoea), but its medicinal properties are not as highly valued as they once were.

It is the birthday flower for 22nd August.

