

*Ribes uva-crispa*

[Synonyms : *Grossularia reclinata*, *Grossularia uva-crispa*, *Ribes grossularia*, *Ribes grossularia* var. *pubescens*, *Ribes grossularia* var. *uva-crispa*, *Ribes reclinatum*]

**GOOSEBERRY** is a deciduous shrub. Native to Europe and North Africa it has small greenish-white or yellow flowers with long stamens.

It is also known as *Amalanche* (Hindi), *Amlanch* (Punjabi), *Angrešt* (Czech), *Baikunti* (Hindi), *Carberry*, *Catberry*, *Common gooseberry*, *Dabbery*, *Dayberry*, *Deberry*, *Dewberry*, *Egreš obyčajný* (Slovak), *Eirin Mair* (Welsh), *European gooseberry*, *European grossularia*, *Fea*, *Feaberry*, *Feabes*, *Feverberry*, *Garden gooseberry*, *Goggle*, *Goosegob*, *Goosegog*, *Gossberry*, *Grizzle*, *Groseille* (French), *Groseille à maquereau* (French), *Groseille verte* (French), *Groseillier épineux* (French), *Grosellero* (Spanish), *Grosellero espinoso* (Spanish), *Groser*, *Grossberry*, *Grossularia rossa* (Italian), *Grouaisiles* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Groyet* (French), *Grozet*, *Grozzle*, *Guerouaisier* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Honeyblob*, *Karviainen* (Finnish), *Kruisbes* (Dutch), *Krusbär* (Swedish), *Meruzalka srstka* (Czech), *Ríbezľa* (Slovak), *Ribo dorna* (Esperanto), *Ribsel* (German), *Srstka angrešt* (Czech), *Stachelbeere* (German), *Uva crispa* (Italian), *Uva espino* (Spanish), *Uva spina* (Italian), *Wild gooseberry*, and *Wineberry*; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of anticipation, and regret.

The flowers are pollinated by various insects including wasps.

Unless gooseberry 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.

*Uva-crispa* is derived from Latin *uva* (bunch of grapes) and *crispa* (closely curled, finely or irregularly wavy), and in its entirety is an Italian name for the species.

The Italian name *Grossularia* which means ‘gooseberry’ was once accepted as part of the botanical name and is said to be a corruption of the French name *Groseille*. Gooseberry is so named is derived according to some authorities from ‘gorse’ and ‘berry’ as both are prickly plants. Others contend that the name arose because the fruit was used to flavour a sorrel sauce to enhance goose dishes, and yet others are convinced that it is a corruption of ‘crossberry’.

English records of 1276 show that gooseberries were growing in the Westminster gardens of Edward I (1239-1307) and thus indicate that the plant must have been introduced to Britain earlier than that. It is alleged that in England by 1780 one could purchase as many as 320 different varieties (only botanists and horticulturists could say if this is credible). Many of these must have been fostered by the ‘gooseberry clubs’ popular towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in northern England. These held competitions for the heaviest and/or most flavoursome fruit and in so doing enhanced the development of the plant.

Cornish gardeners used the appearance of leaves on their gooseberry bushes as a signal that runner beans (*Phaseolus coccineus*) needed to be planted.

An old English superstition held that if you ate gooseberries at Whitsun (when it was traditional to eat gooseberry pie) you would not make a fool of yourself for the remainder of the year. In many parts of the United Kingdom (and no doubt other parts of Europe) young children even recently have been convinced that new babies are found under gooseberry

bushes. While in Germany the bushes were often grown around cowsheds to protect the cattle from witches on Walpurgis Night (30<sup>th</sup> April).

Gooseberries are associated with several old English sayings. Instead of the British 'silly season' (usually August) referred to today when the media resort to filling the news with an even greater number of extravagant stories, the similar period in recent past centuries (when Parliament and Law Courts were in recess and fashionable folk had left town) used to be called the 'big gooseberry season'. Another phrase still heard occasionally today is 'to play gooseberry' which means to be in the position of chaperon or an unwanted third in lovers' company. And

He played old gooseberry with me  
meant that he took liberties with my property and me.

The famous English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) refers to the fruit with disparagement in Part 2 of *Henry IV*.

..... all the other gifts appertinent to man, as the malice  
of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry.

The plants are capable of reaching both great age and size. A 46-year old plant near Derby in England in 1821 is said to have measured 12 yards in circumference, and two espaliered plants in Chesterfield trained on a wall between them are held to have reached 50 ft. in length.

Culinary use of the fruit particularly in northern Europe is well-known but in the past this extended to the tender young leaves that were added to salads. In some areas the fruit were eaten traditionally at Whitsun.

Gooseberry is thought to have been introduced to North America by the early European settlers probably in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Today the berry pulp provides an ingredient for the cosmetics industry for use in face-masks for greasy skin.

Medicinally, as recently as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the fruit were recommended as a preventative for some plague outbreaks. In earlier times also gooseberry thorns were valued in the treatment of warts and styes. (One widespread method for the latter was to lance it with a gooseberry thorn that had been passed through a wedding ring, whereas an Irish remedy merely required the thorn to be pointed at the sty and it would vanish with the words 'Away, away, away'.) The fruit were also believed to be able to encourage appetite, riper fruit were used in the treatment of stomach ailments, and the leaves were part of remedies to deal with bladder and kidney stones.

It is the birthday flower for 28<sup>th</sup> September.