

# Riverview Germplasm American black currant

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plant Materials Center, Bismarck, North Dakota



## Riverview Germplasm American black currant (source identified class) *Ribes americanum*

### Description

American black currant is a native shrub species three to six feet tall with erect branches lacking spines, on multiple stems. The simple, three to five lobed alternate leaves are one to three inches wide and gland-dotted beneath. The glands are golden-yellow in color. Small flowers open in May and have five yellow petals. In central North Dakota, the median date for full flowering is May 21, with an average flowering period of 22 days. Tubular flowers are visited by bumblebees which suck nectar and sweat bees which collect pollen. Drooping racemes produce glossy, red-purple to nearly black fruit (¼ to ½ inch in diameter) in August-September. The globose berries are smooth and contain many seeds. Ripe fruits are sweet and



*Small yellow flowers open in May.  
Leaves are 3-5 lobed.*

desirable for human consumption. They are commonly eaten by birds and small mammals through the fall season. Propagation is primarily from seed with some layering and basal sprouting. American black currant forms open thickets, but does not spread by suckering. Seedling vigor is good, and growth rate is medium. Lifespan is considered short to medium. It has moderate flood tolerance, and is considered highly drought tolerant. It occurs naturally as an understory species and is shade tolerant. It is rated high in palatability by browsing animals, but the evaluation plots in North Dakota showed little damage.

This species occurs from New Brunswick west to Alberta, south to Delaware, West Virginia, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, and New Mexico. For current distribution, consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

American black currant occurs primarily along stream banks and in moist ravines, but also in wet meadows, floodplains, and woodland edges. The species is suitable for many conservation and agroforestry plantings on a variety of soil types. It grows best in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 3-5.

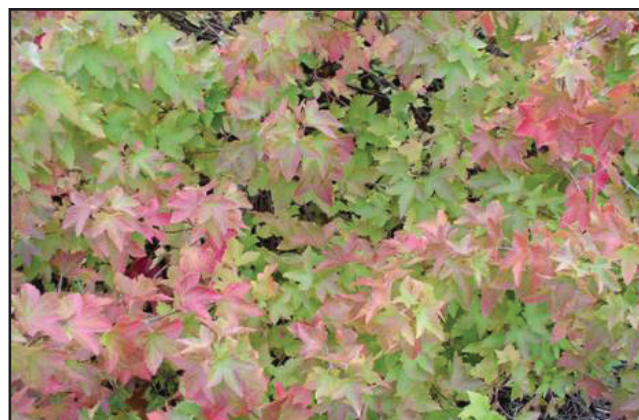
### Uses

**Windbreaks:** This species is suitable for the outside rows of multi-row belts.

**Wildlife:** Black currant is a favored browse of grazing animals. Birds and small mammals eat the berries. This species may form thickets which are desirable for habitat.

**Recreation and Agroforestry:** This low-growing shrub has attractive flowers which are visited by insect pollinators. The berries are nearly black in color, with a smooth, glossy surface. They are high in vitamins and antioxidants and are used for human consumption. The crimson/gold fall leaf color adds to its visual appeal.

**Historical:** The Great Lakes Ojibwa know this as amikomin. The fruit was considered good to eat when cooked.



*Black currant has attractive fall colors.*

## Collection Site Information

Original seed was hand harvested from naturally occurring plants growing along the Big Sioux River near Watertown, South Dakota. Harvest dates ranged from August 15 to September 4. Staff at Big Sioux Nursery collected seed from several locations approximately 5 miles apart along the floodplain of the river. This area is located in northeastern South Dakota (Codington County), Major Land Resource Area 102A, Rolling Till Prairie. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone is 4a. Most of this area is in farms, and about 70 percent is cropland. Wooded areas generally are narrow bands along streams and rivers or are shelterbelts around farmsteads. Associated woody species are cottonwood, green ash, boxelder, hackberry, chokecherry, and golden currant. The nearly level to rolling topography has many wetland depressions.

## Establishment

Nursery grown seedlings establish readily if planted free of competing vegetation, in locations having 14 inches or more of annual precipitation. Bareroot seedlings should be planted in the spring, once the threat of frost is over. Seedlings break bud very early, and may even break bud in cool storage, before planting. Containerized stock may be planted from spring to the middle of summer, if there is adequate moisture. Fertilization is not needed. The optimum spacing is 5 to 6 feet between plants, as mature plants tend to be wider than they are tall.

**Management:** Control of invading weeds and grasses is important. Shallow cultivation works best. This currant does not spread by suckering. Plants begin fruiting after three years.

**Pests and Potential Problems:** Insects and disease are not serious problems. Good air circulation will help in the prevention of leaf spot and other fungal diseases.

**Environmental Concerns:** American black currant is considered a risk for serving as a host for the white pine blister rust. It is not tolerant of fire.



**Mature shrubs are wider than tall.  
Note golden currant shrubs on left have already  
dropped leaves in August due to disease.**

## Potential Area of Adaptation

This selection has performed well in numerous test plantings on diverse sites in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Adaptation is anticipated to be across regions of the Upper Midwest and Northern Great Plains on Conservation Tree and Shrub Groups 1, 3, 4, and 5. The best growth and fruit production occurs on moist, but well-drained sites in full sun. Good weed control improves overall plant performance.



**The fruit is high in vitamins and antioxidants.**

## Production

There are approximately 313,000 seeds per pound of American black currant. Eighteen pounds of fruit will yield a pound of seed. Currant seeds naturally germinate in the spring following dispersal. In the nursery trade, seed is sown in the fall, with seedlings being grown for one season.

## Availability

These plant materials are available from commercial sources. Riverview Germplasm is a source identified release which originates from South Dakota. It is released by the USDA NRCS Plant Materials Center, Bismarck, ND, and the Agricultural Experiment Stations in North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota.

### **For more information, contact:**

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