United States Department of Agriculture
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
Plant Guide

GOLDEN CURRANT

Ribes aureum Pursh var. *aureum*

plant symbol = RIAUA

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center & the Biota of North America Program

Botany Dept., NMNH, Smithsonian Institution @ PLANTS

Alternate common names
Buffalo currant, fragrant golden currant, golden flowering currant, clove currant, spicebush

Uses
Fruits of *Ribes* species, including the golden currant, are a valuable food source for songbirds, chipmunks, ground squirrels, as well as numerous wildlife species and other animals. The sweet and flavorful fruits are full of seeds but are popular for making jam, jelly, pie, and even ice cream. Some western Indian tribes used currants (*Ribes* species) for making pemmican. The Kiowa Indians believed that snakes were afraid of the currant bush and used it as a snakebite remedy. Other tribes have used the fruits to color clay pots.

The fragrant (clove odor), golden-yellow flowers of spring, yellowish to red fall foliage, edible fruits, and wide ecological range make golden currant a valued ornamental shrub for a variety of natural landscapes. Golden currant is easily cultivated from seed or cuttings.

Status
Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description
General: Currant family (Grossulariaceae). A native shrub growing 1-3 m tall, spineless, with numerous, erect-arching branches forming an irregular crown up to 6 meters tall or more; bark gray to red-brown; rhizomatous. Leaves are deciduous, light green and glossy, alternate or clustered, orbicular or cuneate-ovate with 3-5 rounded lobes, (0.6-)1-2.5(4.7) cm long and wide, cuneate to subcordate at base, glabrous or sometimes lightly hairy beneath. Flowers found in short racemes of 5-10(-15), with the fragrance of cloves; long-tubed (from fused sepals) and trumpet-shaped, with 5 yellow sepal lobes spreading at the top, with 5, short, reddish petals inserted at the top of the tube. Fruit is a berry 6-10 mm diameter, globose to ellipsoid, ripening from green to yellow to red and finally black to dark purple, with numerous seeds. The common name pertains to the conspicuous, golden flowers; "currant" is the general name for *Ribes* fruit.

Variation within the species: Ribes odoratum, often considered a distinct species, recognized by its considerably larger flowers, has been placed (re-placed, as var. *villosum*) as the eastern segment of the broader species.

Var. *aureum* – (golden currant)
Var. *gracillimum* (Coville & Britt.) Jepson – (golden currant)
Var. *villosum* DC. – (fragrant golden currant, buffalo currant, clove currant)
synonym: *Ribes odoratum* H. Wendl.

Distribution: Var. *aureum* is widespread in the western US and southeastern Canada, with populations in Ontario and perhaps Quebec, as far south in the US as trans-Pecos Texas. Var. *gracillimum* is endemic to California. Var. *villosum* in the central US, from western Texas to Montana and eastward to New York and Vermont; it is absent

from the Atlantic seaboard. The species is naturalized in Europe from garden escapes. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation
Golden currant grows in grasslands, coniferous forests and woodlands, and riparian and mountain shrub communities. It occurs on floodplains, along streams, in ravines and washes, by springs, and on mountain slopes, at elevations of about 800–2600 meters. It is generally an early to mid-seral species in western coniferous forests. Var. *villosum* occurs on cliffs, rocky slopes, ravines, bluffs, open hillside, and thicket margins, often in sandy habitats. Golden currant is somewhat shade tolerant and may grow in open, scattered, and dense pine stands, but it is usually suppressed by a denser canopy.

Flowering (March–)April–June, just after appearance of the leaves; fruiting (May–)June–August.

Establishment
Plants of *Ribes* generally begin fruiting after 3 years. Seeds may remain viable in the soil and duff for many years. Germination is enhanced by scarification, but relatively good germination of golden currant seeds was obtained by stratification at -2.2–2.2 degrees C for 60 days without scarification.

Golden currant transplants well and forms suckers. Plants can also be grown from cuttings. It reproduces vegetatively by rhizomes, sprouting after cutting and fire.

Management
Golden currant can be used to re-vegetate roadsides and disturbed areas, such as mine spoils and rangeland. It is rated mostly good in initial establishment, growth rate. persistence, germination, seed production, ease of planting, and natural spread. It tolerates shearing and may be used on dry, exposed sites in a range of soil types, and it is a good soil stabilizer.

Golden currant is an alternate host for white pine blister rust (*Cronartium ribicola*); this and other species of *Ribes* have been targets of various eradication efforts where white pine is of commercial interest.

Fire top-kills golden currant, but it can survive low- to moderate-severity fire by sprouting from rhizomes. Such fires also scarify soil-stored seed and enhance germination. Severe fire probably kills golden currant and may destroy soil-stored seeds.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)
Please check the Vendor Database, expected to be on-line through the PLANTS Web site in 2001 by clicking on Plant Materials. These plant materials are readily available from commercial sources. One cultivar (‘Crandall’) has been referred to as "the North Country's answer to *Forsythia*." Other horticultural selections have been made for hardiness, flower color and density, and fruit taste and size.

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