

Currants

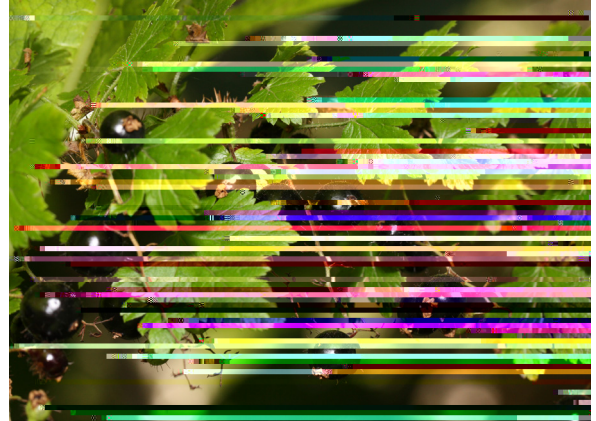
Currants (*Ribes* spp.) are translucent berries clustered on a small branch just below the lobed, toothed leaves. Several currants grow in Alaska, with either red or black fruit. Habitat ranges from moist woods to open areas, along stream banks and in meadows. Berries ripen in mid- to late summer.

They can be eaten raw or dried or made into jams and jellies, syrups, pies and cobblers.

American red currants (*Ribes rubrum* Pallas) are smooth, red, translucent berries found on the straggly brown branches of shrubs. Flowers are in clusters 1 to 2 inches long on old wood just below the leafy tufts. Red currants are found widely in Alaska in cool woods, swamps and subalpine ravines.

They are found from the head of the Lynn Canal in Southeast Alaska east and north to Valdez, Seward, Matanuska, Copper River, Anvik, Kuskokwim River country, the Seward Peninsula and the Kobuk River area.

Trailing black currants (*Ribes nigrum* Pursh) are hairy black berries with a bluish tinge, and are found in Southeast Alaska north to Skagway and Yakutat, on the Kenai Peninsula and in central Alaska. Bristly black currants (*Ribes cynosuavis*), or



Ribes nigrum Photo by Walter Siegmund

swamp gooseberries, are bristly purplish-black berries with a very sour flavor. Northern black currants (*Ribes nigrum*) are smooth berries that are very sour and somewhat bitter. In addition, there are several other barely edible currants that grow in Alaska.

Nutrition and Health

Currants are a rich source of antioxidants, a group of biochemicals shown to be an important part of the human diet. They are a good source of manganese and potassium.



Ribes rubrum Pallas. Photo by Leo Michel

Storage and Preservation

How to Clean and Store

Spread a clean, dry terry cloth towel over a slanted surface, such as a cutting board with one end propped up a few inches above the other. Gently roll the currants down the towel; most of the debris and

leaves will cling to the towel, while the berries roll
o . Currants may be stored covered in the refrigera-
tor for ve to seven days.

How to Freeze

To freeze currants, arrange dry, fresh berries in one

Currant Jelly

6½ cups currant juice

1 package powdered pectin (1¾ ounces)

7 cups sugar

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Measure sugar and set aside. Measure prepared juice into a large saucepan and add powdered pectin. Place on high heat; stir constantly and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. At once stir in sugar. Again, bring to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly skim off foam. Immediately pour jelly into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Process in a boiling water canner for 5 minutes.

idly to gelling point, 220°F. It takes about 30 minutes. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. Pour preserves into hot pint or half-pint canning jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Process 10 minutes in a boiling water canner.

▼ : 9 cups

Currant Fruit Leather- cuips-

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