





Gooseberry *(Ribes grossularia)*

Type	Deciduous/ Evergreen	Height x Width (metres)	Spacing (metres)	Pollinator	Soil type	Sun	Moisture	Shelter	Plant	Harvest
	D	1-1.5 x 1-2	1.5	N				Y	Mid- to late autumn	Late summer

Site

- Needs a cold winter to form plenty of fruit, and prefers cooler summers – but tolerates warmth if it's not humid. Very frost hardy.
- Best in a position with part sun, shade in the afternoons, and sheltered from strong winds, which can break the branches.
- Likes slightly acidic, medium-heavy soil, not prone to drying out.
- Set them well away from pathways, because of their prickles.

Care

- Easy to grow.
- Plant in autumn or late winter, allowing 1.5m in all directions so there is good air circulation.
- Has shallow roots – weed carefully, and mulch in early spring with well-rotted manure or compost.
- Cover with bird netting when the fruit begins to ripen.
- Self-fertile.

Training & pruning

- Train as an open *bush*, or a *cordon*, which makes picking the fruit much easier.
- For both shapes, plant deeply, as the new shoots spring from below ground level.

Cordon

- Space the wires about 60cm apart, with the first wire 60cm from the ground.
- Space plants 45cm apart, supported with a piece of cane tied to the first wire.
- At planting, cut branches that are shorter than 10cm back to ground level.
- Shorten the main leader to half its length and tie it to the piece of cane.
- Shorten all the side shoots (laterals) back to a bud at about 2.5cm.
- Once established, prune in late winter by shortening the leaders to 15cm, and all laterals to 2.5cm.

Open-centred bush

- At planting, cut branches that are shorter than 15cm back to ground level.
- Choose eight to ten branches to keep as the main framework and shorten them to half their length, to an upward-pointing bud. Allow enough space between the branches for airflow and sunlight.
- Once established, bears fruit on older wood – each year shorten the main stems by one-third to force the growth of fruiting laterals. These will last for about 3 years – prune each year to keep a balance of young and older stems e.g.:
Year 1: Cut to ground level all except two or three stems.
Years 2 & 3: Cut back all except two or three stems of that year's growth.



Cordon

Adapted from *How to Make a Forest Garden*



Year 4 onwards: Cut out the oldest stems to make way for new growth, and shorten any extra-long stems.

- Make sure you keep the centre of the bush open – otherwise you won't be able to reach the fruit because of the prickles!

Companions

- Strawberries.

Harvest

- Bears fruit within 2–3 years.
- Pick in late summer when the fruit is fully coloured, slightly soft, and is easy to pull off the stalk (or when it drops to the ground).
- Eat fresh, cooked in pies, tarts, sauces, jams, desserts, or added to sweet-and-sour sauce. Freezes well.

Health

- Good levels of vitamins A, B6, C, and potassium, copper and manganese.

Recommended varieties

- Invicta
- Pax



Tip layering

Plants for free

Hardwood cuttings

- In early autumn, take a cutting about 30cm long from the current season's growth. Remove all the leaves except for the top two, and insert the cutting to half its length into pots of well-drained soil. Keep it in partial shade for the summer.
- Next autumn, dig up the plant and replant it where you want it, with more of the stem exposed, so your gooseberry has a 'standard' – this lifts the bush higher and makes it easier to pick the fruit.



Layering

- Some varieties have drooping branches that are easy to layer.
- In late summer or early autumn, choose a strong healthy cane and bring its tip down to soil level. Dig a hole in this spot, with the near side angled towards the parent plant.
- If the soil is heavy, work in some grit or river sand to improve the drainage.
- Bury the stem tip into the soil and peg it down with a piece of wire.
- Keep it moist until the tip shows new growth in the following spring. Then cut the new plant from the parent plant.
- Be sure to remember to shift it, or you could create a thorny thicket.