

BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Wild black currant (*Ribes americanum*)

Plant family: Gooseberry (*Grossulariaceae*)



From left: Wild black currants' stems are reddish-brown and smooth with light ridges or wings. **Courtesy Photo** Currant flowers are a high-priority food source for the endangered rusty patched bumblebee. This is wild black currant, *Ribes americanum*. **Photo Credit:** Peter Dzuik, Minnesota
Wildflowers Mature fruits are blue-black by late summer. **Photo Credit:** Peter Dzuik, Minnesota Wildflowers Yellow resin glands dot new stems and both leaf surfaces. Glands are usually more numerous on the lower surface of leaf blades. **Courtesy Photo**

Wild black currant, AKA American black currant, is a common Minnesota shrub of moist to wet habitats. It is a source of food and cover for many animals, including Minnesota's state bee, the federally endangered rusty patched bumblebee (*Bombus affinis*).

Identification

Wild black currants have multiple ascending, arching or trailing stems 3 to 6 feet long. They are smooth, but new growth is hairy and older growth may be ridged or winged. Leaves are alternate (attached singly to the stem), palmately lobed

Plant Stats

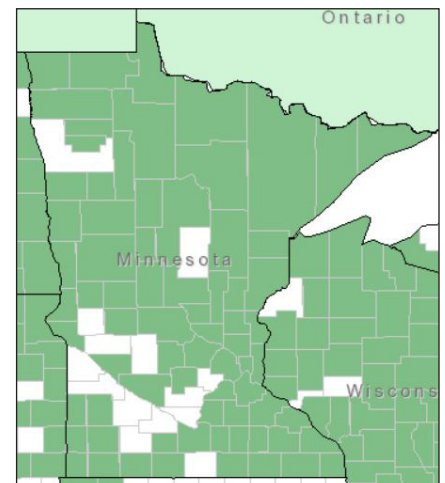
STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACW (Midwest)

PRIMARY USES: Food and cover for wildlife; pollen and nectar for pollinators

and sharply toothed, growing 3 to 4 inches long and wide. Small

yellow resin glands dot both leaf surfaces but are more numerous below. Petioles (leaf stalks) are hairy. Cream to yellow-green flowers bloom from early May into June in a drooping cluster of six to 15. Fruits are smooth, up to a half-inch long, and blue-black when ripe in July or August.

Range



Map source: USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Plants Database

Common throughout Minnesota, wild black currants grow in a variety of soil types but prefer moist or wet conditions. Their habitats include streambanks, swamps, wet meadows, lakeshores and woodland edges.

Planting Recommendations

Choose a moist or wet location in full or partial sun. Plant bareroot seedlings in spring, and potted shrubs from spring through early summer. Space the plants 5 to 6 feet apart to improve air circulation and reduce risk of fungal diseases. Fruiting begins when the plants are 3 years old. Arching stems may root at their tips, eventually forming thickets. Wild black currants can be aggressive in disturbed areas with little competition. In diverse, native communities, they occur as scattered individuals and in small colonies.

Currants and related gooseberries are intermediate hosts of white pine blister rust. This fungal

disease rarely kills Ribes species, but it is deadly to white pine and other five-needled pines. Wild black currants have a lower risk of infection, but see these University of Minnesota Extension [tips to prevent or manage white pine blister rust](#).

Many of the disease-resistant currants available at nurseries are cultivars of European black currants (*Ribes nigrum*) and red currants (*Ribes rubrum*). Native currants are preferred for greater pollinator benefit, but they are uncommon commercially. See the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' [list of native plant suppliers](#).



Leaves are alternate with three to five palmate lobes. Leaf margins are sharply toothed. **Courtesy Photo**

Similar Species

Northern black currants, *Ribes hudsonianum*, are found primarily in conifer swamps in the northern third of the state. Like wild black currants, they have smooth stems and leaves with yellow resin glands,



Flower clusters of northern black currants are upright. **Photo Credit:** Peter Dzuik, Minnesota Wildflowers

but the glands are found only on the lower leaf surface. Unlike wild black currants, the leaves of northern black currants have an unpleasant odor. Their flower clusters are upright rather than drooping.

Uses

Small mammals and birds use wild black currants for food and cover. The flowers attract many pollinators. Like other currants, they are a good source of pollen and nectar for the rusty patched bumblebee. The edible berries are said to be high in vitamins and antioxidants

References

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