

BLACK CURRANT

Ribes nigrum

Black currant (*Ribes nigrum*), also known as blackcurrant and cassis, is a small, perennial shrub with yellowish-green flowers and dark purple berries (currants) that is native to central Europe and northern Asia.^{1,2} Black currant is also cultivated throughout the world, with Poland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom being the biggest producers.³

Uses of cultivated black currant began in Europe during the 17th century. The traditional medicinal uses primarily involved black currant juice, bark decoction, and leaf infusion preparations for fever, fluid retention (edema), and kidney and gall stones. Native American tribes used native *Ribes* species also known as black currant in a similar fashion. In addition, black currant was used as a food to make pemmican, a calorie-dense staple made from tallow, dried meat, and dried berries.¹



Black currant cultivation was banned in the United States in 1911 because some native and non-native *Ribes* species were vectors for white pine blister rust fungus (*Cronartium ribicola*) known to kill five-needle pine trees, thereby impacting the logging industry. New cultivars have since been established and the federal ban was lifted in 1966. Farmers in several states presently cultivate black currant as a high-value crop for the growing commercial market predominated by juice products.¹⁻³

Black currants have a higher concentration of anthocyanins (1,741 ± 49 mg/100 g fresh berries) and vitamin C (up to 181 mg/100 g fresh berries) than blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries, attributing to their antioxidant properties and other health benefits. Anthocyanins are a type of flavonoid known for their characteristic purplish pigments. Cyanidin-3-glucoside, cyanidin-3-rutinoside, delphinidin-3-glucoside, and delphinidin-3-rutinoside make up the majority of black currant's anthocyanin content. The berries are also a source of other nutrients: 100 g of fresh berries includes 6.8 g fiber, 0.26 mg manganese, 0.4 mg vitamin B5, 1.4 mg iron, and 322 mg potassium, and other vitamins and minerals.^{1,3} Black currant seed oil contains the polyunsaturated fatty acid, gamma linolenic acid, and is primarily used in cosmetics.¹

Most human clinical trials on black currant are focused on various inflammatory conditions due to the berry's high anthocyanin content. Limited human clinical trials have studied black currant's antioxidant effects in exercise-induced oxidative stress and eye health. For example, a black currant extract dietary supplement decreased total cholesterol levels in part by inhibiting the absorption of cholesterol and increasing low-density lipoprotein receptor expression in healthy participants. In other studies, black currant products have helped regulate inflammatory markers associated with obesity, metabolic syndrome, and asthma.¹

Black currant is a familiar food in Europe, often used in jams, syrups, and wines. The commercial market for black currant as an ingredient in dietary supplements, cosmetics, and juices is growing, and more U.S.-based farmers are cultivating black currant as a high-value crop. Recent research and products primarily focus on the use of black currant for its antioxidant content and support with inflammatory conditions. Although the scientific evidence is promising, more research is needed to fully understand all of the health benefits of black currant.



REFERENCES:

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- 3 Cortez RE & Gonzalez de Mejia E. (2019). Blackcurrants (*Ribes nigrum*): A Review on chemistry, processing, and health benefits. *Journal of food science*, 84(9), 2387-2401.



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