

Currants and Gooseberries: Prohibited Towns in Massachusetts

Currants and gooseberries have been under cultivation for several centuries. They are extremely popular in England and other Northern European countries, but growing them in Massachusetts depends on what town you live in. This group consists of three types of fruit: gooseberries, red and white currants, and black currants. They are frequently referred to collectively as *Ribes* species. The cultivation and propagation of these are restricted in many places in the United States. This article provides some background about the origin of these restrictions and an indication of where this group of plants can be legally grown.

The culprit is the disease, white pine blister rust, which was introduced into the U.S. on white pine seedlings imported in the late 1800's. This disease is fatal to white pines and other 5-needled pines. Currants and goose-berries are an intermediary host for this disease - in order for the disease to complete its life cycle and infect white pines, it must spend some time on a currant or gooseberry. It was soon discovered that the best way to control this devastating disease on white pine was to break its life cycle by eliminating all currants and gooseberries. Thus began a federal quarantine and eradication program, where a ban was placed on the importation, propagation and culture of all *Ribes*. Further, a rather extensive program was put into place to destroy both wild and cultivated *Ribes*. This was accomplished by legions of Boy Scouts, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the WPA. As a result of these efforts, nearly all *Ribes* were eliminated and the U.S. lifted its ban in the 1960's.

Many states have allowed their regulations to lapse or do not enforce regulations that remain on the books. However, in areas where white pine is important, restrictions remain. Delaware, New Jersey and North Carolina prohibit the importation and culture of all currants and gooseberries. Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont allow planting in certain areas. Culture of black currants in Massachusetts is prohibited. Planting of red and white currants and gooseberries is determined by cities and towns. Below is a list of cities and towns where the culture, sale or propagation of currants and gooseberries is restricted in Massachusetts.

Even though culture of *Ribes* in a town is permitted, individuals are still required to obtain a permit from the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture before purchasing plants. A permit may be obtained by contacting the Department of Food and Agriculture. More frequently, individuals order plants from a nursery. The nursery then contacts the Mass. Department of Food and Agriculture and provides the name of the individual ordering the plants, the city or town where they will be grown, and the number and type of plants that the individual is ordering. The permit is issued as the result of the process initiated by the nursery.

Currants and gooseberries are attractive plants that prosper in cool areas and under partial shade. Since they thrive under conditions that are marginal for many plants, they could be an important part of a home landscape or garden. A subsequent article will discuss the cultural and management needs of these very interesting plants.

**Cities and towns in Massachusetts where planting of currants and gooseberries
is prohibited**

Acton	Bridgewater	Egremont	Hardwick	Medfield	Orange	Shirley	Wenham
Alford	Buckland	Erving	Harvard	Merrimac	Otis	Shutesbury	W. Bridgewater
Amesbury	Canton	Essex	Haverhill	Methuen	Pembroke	Southampton	West Newbury
Andover	Carlisle	Foxboro	Hawley	Middleboro	Pepperell	Stockbridge	Westford
Ashburnham	Carver	Freetown	Heath	Middlefield	Petersham	Stoughton	Westhampton
Ashby	Charlemont	Gardner	Hubbardston	Middleton	Phillipston	Stow	Westminster
Ashfield	Chelmsford	Georgetown	Huntington	Millis	Plainfield	Sunderland	Whately
Athol	Chester	Gill	Ipswich	Montague	Plymouth	Taunton	Williamsburg
Ayer	Chesterfield	Gloucester	Kingston	Monterey	Plympton	Templeton	Wilmington
Barre	Colrain	Goshen	Lakeville	New Marlboro	Princeton	Tewksbury	Winchendon
Becket	Conway	Granville	Lancaster	New Salem	Raynham	Tolland	Worthington
Berkley	Cummington	Gt. Barrington	Lee	Newbury	Rochester	Topsfield	Wrentham
Bernardston	Deerfield	Greenfield	Lenox	Newburyport	Rowley	Townsend	
Billerica	Dover	Groton	Leverett	Norfolk	Royalston	Tyngsboro	
Blandford	Dracut	Groveland	Leyden	North Andover	Salisbury	Tyringham	
Bolton	Dunstable	Halifax	Littleton	North Reading	Sandisfield	Walpole	
Boxboro	Duxbury	Hamilton	Manchester	Northfield	Sharon	Wareham	
Boxford	E. Bridgewater	Hanover	Mansfield	Norton	Sheffield	Warwick	
	Easton	Hanson	Marshfield	Norwell	Shelburne	Wendell	

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