

Gooseberries (*Ribes* spp.)

DESCRIPTION:

Gooseberries are short native shrubs in the current family. They have small, three-lobed, maple-like leaves, less than 3" across. In late-spring they have small, hanging cream to yellow flowers that are favored by a variety of pollinators including bumble bees, native solitary bees and hummingbirds. These develop into clusters of small edible berries which are favored by birds. The foliage is consumed by over a dozen species of butterfly caterpillars and other insects.

They are often armed with thorn-like "bustles". These narrow, straight thorns protect the gooseberries from herbivory like deer and cattle. Being so well protected, gooseberries can sometimes become overabundant in woodlands with a history of heavy grazing. The grazing acts as a selective pressure against less well-protected species, giving these prickly little shrubs an unfair advantage.

Though gooseberries are desirable native plants in the right numbers, they can be problematic when they are too abundant. They can dominate natural areas competing with other plants for resources. Their thorny structure can also make it difficult for people to move around in the woods which can further retard ecological restoration work.

The most common gooseberry in our region is Missouri or wild gooseberry (*Ribes missouriense*). Somewhat less common is prickly gooseberry (*Ribes cynosbati*) which can be differentiated by the thorns on its berries and because the point on the leaf where the leaf stalk attaches is highly indented. Rarely, particularly in more moist or shady sites, you will find wild black currant (*Ribes americanum*) which lacks thorns and never seems to get overpopulated like the other species.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Simply mowing gooseberries may be enough to keep them in check. We'd recommend doing so shortly after they fully leaf-out in late-spring, when they have the lowest root energy reserves. Winter may be another good time to mow if you are concerned about damage to neighboring wildflowers.

Chemical: The most effective way to control deciduous shrubs is to cut them as close to the ground as possible and carefully apply concentrated herbicide to the stump. Glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) or an oil-based solution of triclopyr (Garlon® 4, Brush-B-Gone®) will be effective. A foliar spray of these chemicals (at appropriate concentrations as listed on the product label) may be faster in areas of large monocultures or where there are few quality native plants that may be harmed by overspray.

These recommendations are not a substitute for the pesticide label. The label is the law; read it and follow the instructions before applying any pesticide.

0
Pesky
Native



Missouri gooseberry stem.



Missouri gooseberry flowers.



Black currant leaf.



Missouri gooseberry berries.