

Scientific Name: *Ribes hudsonianum* Richards.

Family: *Grossulariaceae*

Common Names: northern black currant, black currant, Hudson Bay currant

Plant Description

Erect to ascending, deciduous shrub with a sweet “tomcat” odour, 50 to 150 cm tall; branches smooth (no prickles), with yellow, crystalline resin dots; leaves alternate maple leaf-like with 3 to 5 lobes, usually 5 to 7 cm wide, sharply toothed, dotted with yellow resin glands (Kershaw et al. 1998).

Fruit: Black berries with a whitish, waxy bloom, usually speckled with a few yellow resin dots, 5 to 10 mm wide (Kershaw et al. 1998).

Seed: An oval seed that is approximately 1.7 mm by 1 mm (Young and Young 1992).



Ribes hudsonianum in flower

Habitat and Distribution

Moist woods, forests, stream banks (EFloras 2010, Moss 1983).

Seral Stage: Mid to late seral.

Soil: Does best in medium to coarse textured soils with a pH tolerance 5 to 6.9 and no salinity tolerance (USDA NRCS n.d.).

Distribution: Alaska, Yukon, southern District of Mackenzie to James Bay south to Washington, Idaho, western Montana, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Minnesota, southern Ontario (Moss 1983).

Phenology

Flowers May through July (Young and Young 1992).

Pollination

Plants cannot self-pollinate. Insects are the primary pollinator but wind pollinates flowers as well (Plants for a Future n.d.).

Genetics

$2n=16$ (Moss 1983).

Symbiosis

Some *Ribes* spp. have been shown to have mycorrhizal relationships (Cornelissen et al. 2001).

Seed Processing

Collection: Collect by hand when ripe. The berries should be picked or stripped from the bushes as soon as they are ripe because they are quickly eaten by wildlife (Young and Young 1992).

Seed Weight: 0.73 g/1,000 (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

0.47 g/1,000 seeds (Young and Young 1992).

Fruit/Seed by Weight: No literature found.

Harvest Dates: Seed crops are born every year but every 2 to 3 years there is a bumper crop (Young and Young 1992).

Cleaning: Seeds can be cleaned using a blender with protected blades but the risk of seed damage can be greatly reduced if the fruit are mashed with pectinase, instead. The mixture is flocculated and floating seeds



(generally nonviable) are discarded (Hummer and Barney 2002).

Storage Behaviour: Orthodox (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

Storage: Store at cool temperatures at sealed containers (Young and Young 1992).

Seeds are air dried, placed within a desiccator, and stored in paper or aluminium foil envelopes at -20°C (Hummer and Barney 2002).

Longevity: Dried seeds can be stored in sealed containers (Young and Young 1992).



Ripe *Ribes hudsonianum* berries

Propagation

Natural Regeneration: Regenerates mainly by seed and has moderate vegetative spread (USDA NRCS n.d.).

Germination: Epigeal germination. The rate of germination for *Ribes* spp. varies widely with and among seedlots (Young and Young 1992).

Daily alternating temperatures increase germination rates and percentages (Hummer and Barney 2002).

Pre-treatment: Most *Ribes* spp. are highly dormant and require a prolonged cold stratification, then a warm stratification, followed by a cold stratification (Young and Young 1992).

Place in cold moist stratification for 90 to 120 days (Baskin and Baskin 2002).

For optimal germination, seeds are stratified at 4 °C for 3 months before sowing (Hummer and Barney 2002).

Direct Seeding: No literature found.

Seed Rate: Should be sown at a rate 630 to 840/ m² (Young and Young 1992).

Planting Density: 3,000 to 4,700 plants/ha (USDA NRCS n.d.).

Vegetative Propagation: Most species of *Ribes* can be reproduced by hardwood cuttings and layering (Tannas 1997, Young and Young 1992). Semi-hardwood cuttings, 1 to 15 cm, taken in July and August or hardwood cuttings, with heel, taken in the winter may be successful (Plants for a Future n.d.).

Aboriginal/Food Uses

Food: Eaten fresh, cooked for jam, salads, wine; flavour home brew (Marles et al. 2000).

Medicinal: Boiled leafy stems decoction can be drunk to treat a cough or sickness at childbirth as well as to bring on menstruation (Marles et al. 2000). A tea made from wild black currant and skunk currant can help a woman to conceive (Wilkinson 1990).

Wildlife/Forage Usage

Wildlife: Birds and smaller animals eat the berries. Plant makes a poor quality browse (Tannas 1997). Favoured by bears, grouse and songbirds (Wilkinson 1990).

Livestock: Poor quality browse and generally not used if there are better food sources available (Tannas 1997).

Grazing Response: Increaser (Tannas 1997).

Reclamation Potential

Ribes spp. can be used for erosion control in areas that have good moisture conditions; have moderate tolerance to acidity (Tannas 1997).

Notes

Ribes hudsonianum is listed as 98% intact (less occurrences than expected) in the Alberta oil sands region (Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute 2014).

Many species of *Ribes* are a host to white pine blister rust (Young and Young 1992).

Photo Credits

Photos: Walter Muma @ Ontario Wildflowers. 2011.

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