

Portstone

GARDEN CENTRE

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CURRENTS Oh, so good for you, full of vitamin A, B, C and rich in iron, copper and manganese. Blackcurrants, red currants and white currants, what's your favourite recipe? Mine is blackcurrant jam, I've made it every year now for years, it's so easy. But this year I have planted an extra bush and I'm going to make blackcurrant brandy! Red currant jelly is a classic accompaniment to hot and cold meats and white currants, well they are good for jellies and desserts as well as decoration, both on food or on the bush in the garden.

Currents are happy in partial to full sunlight with fertile, slightly acidic soil and good drainage. They need some wind protection and good watering over summer when they are fruiting. Because they have a shallow root system, it is essential to keep a thick mulch under them to smother competing weeds and to retain moisture. Currents are extremely hardy plants but a late frost in spring during flowering can reduce crop yield.

GOLIATH is a very old variety that is considered to be a connoisseur's blackcurrant. The very large thin-skinned berries are borne in mid-season on short trusses.

MAGNUS accounts for over 70% of the commercial crop grown in New Zealand. It has an upright habit, making easy picking, has a good fruit set and is disease resistant.

GIANT RUBY has large fruit that all ripen simultaneously so the whole truss can be picked rather than having to pick each berry individually.

DWARF PEAR TREE GARDEN BELLE is the only truly dwarf pear variety, growing to just 3 metres tall. It forms an attractive tree with lovely golden orange autumn foliage. The fruit is deliciously sweet with smooth, soft flesh and green, mildly russeted skin. It ripens in late summer and stores well for several months when refrigerated.

APPLE BLUSH BABE is also a dwarf fruit tree of similar mop head habit, but grows to only two metres. It produces delicious full-sized crispy red fruit and has natural disease resistance which means little spraying is required. Little or no pruning is needed.

BALLERINA APPLES are tall and thin, growing to 4 metres high but only 30cm wide. This shape makes use of the vertical space in your garden, leaving room for other plants, but being deciduous, it's not going to shade precious winter sun. There are three yummy varieties to choose from as well as two crabapple varieties.

HERBS are a big seller this season with people wanting to create areas dedicated to herbs either in the garden or in containers. Half wine barrels are ideal with everything in one place, easy picking without bending, holds the moisture and looks really great. You can fit plenty of plants in there for both edible and medicinal use. Hanging baskets are another attractive container for herbs especially if you only require a few for a small household.

LAWN is the one thing most of us have as part of our garden, but maintaining a good lawn can be very challenging. Spring is the time to develop new lawn, either sow seed, lay turf, or you may just need to re-seed patches that are looking weedy. Which ever it is, good preparation is essential for a good end result. Eradicating weeds, especially perennial ones is the first step, then firming the soil until it is perfectly level is the tricky part. Once this is done, you can sow seed, sprinkling in two different directions so you don't get lines. Use Lawn Preparation Mix to lightly cover the seed, or use to fill dips in existing lawn. Keep the area damp while the seed is germinating, 10 - 14 days. If it's not new lawn you are creating, but maintaining existing lawn, then now is the time to feed it with a high nitrogen slow-release fertilizer. If there are weeds you want to get rid of, use a Weed n Feed, or apply a moss killer now if moss is a problem. When summer arrives and the days are hot, raise the mower blades and mow less frequently to encourage a stronger, drought-resistant sward.

SHRUB OF THE MONTH

Illicium anisatum, related to star anise but not edible. It's a delightful little shrub, with fresh lime green leaves, and frilly little creamy flowers. It grows well in shade so is perfect as a light, bright backdrop for other darker plants.