



SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

15185 Murphy Avenue
San Martin, CA 95046
(408) 779-3303

Ribes sanguineum

The 'Flowering Currant' is a plant which enjoys a far greater popularity in Europe than it does here on the West Coast. It has for long been regarded by gardeners in Western Europe as one of the worthiest of spring flowering shrubs, and is grown extensively in a range of cultivars. The popularity of this shrub is not only attributable to a combination of its early season of flowering and bright flower colour, but also to its reliability for blooming each year, the profuseness of flower production, its hardiness and its adaptability to a variety of soils conditions.

Ribes sanguineum was originally discovered in the Puget Sound area by Archibald Menzies, in 1793. Eventually it was sent back to England to The Horticultural Society in 1826 by David Douglas. This plant has an extensive distribution from mid-California northwards to British Columbia and is found in a wide variety of habitats - varying from open, sunny and dry chapparal conditions to glades in moist, mixed woodlands.

The Flowering Currant is a deciduous, well branched shrub which will grow to a height and spread of 8 - 10 feet. The colourful racemes of flowers are produced in spring; usually just before, or just as, the leaves emerge. In order to achieve maximum flower production it should be grown in a situation where it can be allowed to establish and mature without the necessity for pruning, except perhaps for an initial shaping. If pruning is required in order to constrain it to a particular size, then flower production is almost certain to be curtailed. If pruning does become necessary then it should take place just after flowering has finished so that new shoots have a chance to grow and mature flower buds before leaf fall.

The species Ribes sanguineum is recognised as consisting of two varieties, i) var. sanguineum which occurs from Lake Co., California north to British Columbia, chiefly in moist, mixed woodland conditions and ii) var. glutinosum with a much more limited distribution in the Coastal Ranges of California from Santa Barbara Co. north to Del Norte Co. but over a much wider variety of habitats from chapparal to Closed Cone Pine Forest; however the morphological distinctions between the two are tenuous and it is probably best to distinguish them for use in cultivation on the basis of their provenance.

The variety glutinosum is suited to a variety of climates in California. It will grow satisfactorily in an unirrigated landscape once established - but it will develop into a much

fuller shrub with summer irrigation. Although recognised and widely admired as a valuable spring flowering shrub, little or no selection has been undertaken, despite the extensive variation which occurs in the native population. In its typical form the drooping racemes of flowers are pink in colour, often branched and about four inches long. SHF grows a vegetatively propagated selection, which is currently offered as var. glutinosum and which has particularly good, deep rose-coloured flowers.

'Claremont' is a cultivar which has been selected and grown by the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden for many years. It is characterised by the enormous, drooping and branching racemes of pink flowers, which can develop to eight or nine inches in length. The shrub will attain a height and spread of seven to ten feet.

'Album' is a cultivar which has been selected for its large, drooping and branching racemes of clear white flowers and its pale green leaves. It was found and collected in southern Oregon and came into commerce in California via Marshall Olbrich of Western Hills Nursery.

The northern variety sanguineum - the 'Red Flowering Currant' is marginally less tolerant of summer dryness, and it should benefit by planting in an irrigated or even partially shaded landscape in California. The typical flower colour is deep rose or red.

A number of cultivars of this provenance of British origin are available here on the West Coast - the most notable of which are 'Pulborough Scarlet' and 'King Edward VII'. Both of these have deep red flowers. 'Pulborough Scarlet' is a fairly rank growing form which will achieve a height and spread of ten feet or so, it is spectacular when in full flower. 'King Edward VII' is similar but is distinguished by its compact habit and smaller size - to a height and spread of seven feet or so, and slightly later but equally profuse flowering.

'Elk River Red' is a selection from the Pacific Northwest with red flowers.

The cultivar 'White Icicle' is a new selection which will be released by the UBC Plant Introduction Scheme in Vancouver in March 1988. It has pure white flowers and bright green foliage on a shrub of compact habit. It was collected some years ago near Victoria on Vancouver Island and has been cultivated in the UBC Botanic Garden for a number of years.