

## Web special: **Legal Restrictions on Growing *Ribes* Species**

The Federal Plant Quarantine Act of 1912, the first U.S. law that restricted the movement of plants from one region to another, was enacted as a result of the spread of white pine blister rust (WPBR), a fungal disease that requires both white pine (or other North American five-needle pine species) and a susceptible *Ribes* species growing in close proximity to complete its life cycle. WPBR was introduced from Europe to North America in the early 1900s. While the fungus causes minimal damage to *Ribes*, it is devastating to white pines.

In 1966, the federal law was rescinded, as it became known that certain species and varieties of currant, gooseberry, and jostaberry are resistant to the disease. But in several states, the laws restricting cultivation of *Ribes* remain.

One of these states is Maine. "Maine is 'the Pine Tree State,' with most of the state's land in forest and the economy still strongly linked to the forest industry," says small fruit specialist, David Handley, of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service. "Black currants are prohibited throughout the state. Other *Ribes* species can only be grown outside of a quarantine zone that extends through most of the state, leaving only extreme eastern (coastal) and northern Maine... outside of its limits," explains Handley.

"The rules about whether one can grow currants and gooseberries vary by state, and then even within states, there are many smaller entities--counties, townships, etc.--that have their own regulations," explains Marvin Pritts, professor of horticulture at Cornell University. While some states restrict all species of *Ribes*, others permit cultivation of resistant species and varieties. "Some states restrict delivery into the state, but allow growing them. This makes it impossible to generalize," adds Pritts. New York State modified restrictions in 2003, to allow commercial growers and home gardeners to legally grow immune or resistant cultivars of *Ribes* throughout the State.

Other states that restrict the cultivation of all or some *Ribes* include: Massachusetts, West Virginia, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Virginia, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Delaware, and Connecticut. If you live in these states, be sure to check with your local extension agent or state department of agriculture before you plant. --Rita Pelczar, Contributing Editor