

## **Blackcurrants offer great financial potential for growers**

JULY traditionally sees the start of blackcurrant harvesting. Blackcurrants are an underrepresented crop with great potential in Wales as a traditional crop and although there has been a recent increase in blueberry production here, surprisingly this hasn't been matched with an increase in blackcurrant production. Blackcurrants also have similar health benefits to blueberries, being considered a 'superfood' owing to their high levels of vitamin C and anthocyanins.

Blackcurrants grow best in a moisture retentive soil, rich in organic matter and will tolerate partial shade, for example if grown in an orchard or woodland edge. Depending on variety, the blossom can be susceptible to late frosts, and they are suitable to the Welsh summer climate of mixed sunshine and rain. Once established the plants can remain productive for 10 years or longer with the correct maintenance.

The first commercial harvest will take place during the third year. Maximum yields are obtained during the period between the fourth and eighth years. The average yield for UK blackcurrants is around 6.5 tonnes of blackcurrants per hectare. Over the past two years, the wholesale price for the fruit has averaged between £3 and £4 per kilogram. Price is dependent on the usual factors such as quality, availability, variety, weather, etc. The price paid for direct sale of fruits, for instance at a farm shop, is usually considerably higher than the wholesale price.

The short fruiting period of blackcurrants means most growers have a range of varieties in their plantations to spread the fruiting season. The short fruiting period also means that there is a period where much more labour is required than through the rest of the year and this needs careful planning. Although blackcurrants are a traditional and popular summer fruit, it is important to keep the public aware of their tastiness, versatility and health benefits. They shouldn't only be thought of as the precursors to a well known blackcurrant drink!

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