

GOOSEBERRIES (*Ribes* spp.)

Four types of gooseberries grow in our area: Missouri, prickly, Canadian and smooth. Fruits from these species taste about the same, so they all work for any gooseberry recipe. Gooseberries are unusual because the fruit can be used in its green stage as well as when fully ripe. They have a tart, refreshing flavor, somewhat reminiscent of rhubarb; ripe gooseberries are sweeter than green ones. Green gooseberries are rich in pectin, so they can be used to make jam without adding commercial pectin; they also make a good pie filling, because the pectin helps thicken the juices naturally.

When picking green gooseberries, choose those that are close to full size, about 3/8

Yes, those fierce-looking prickly gooseberries are edible! The spines are fairly soft, so picking them isn't painful (except for the thorns that grow on the stems). Cooking softens the prickles, making them unnoticeable.

inch across; they will still be firm, but will begin to appear slightly translucent around the edges. Taste one before picking a lot (unless you're picking prickly gooseberries, which are too spiny to taste raw). If the berry is hard and tastes acrid, the gooseberries are underripe; wait a week or so before picking. As summer progresses,

you'll see gooseberries in all stages of ripeness on the plant at the same time, and you'll quickly get a feel for judging the correct stage.

Gooseberries grow abundantly on the plants, and you'll often find plants in small colonies, so it's easy to pick a good quantity. The work starts once you get them home, because you'll need to remove the stems and the "pigtail," a withered brown flower remnant at the base of the berry (if you're juicing the fruit, you don't need to remove the stems or tails). To clean green gooseberries, use a very sharp paring knife to slice off the stem and all parts of the pigtail. A knife works best on green gooseberries, which are firm enough to allow slicing. Once gooseberries ripen, the pressure of the knife and your fingertips tends to mangle the berries; sharp scissors work better (or pinch the stems and tails off with your fingernails).

To make gooseberry juice, place washed gooseberries in a small non-aluminum soup pot (you don't need to remove the stems or tails). Gently crush the fruit with a potato masher to start the flow of juice. Add 1/2 cup water per quart of gooseberries. Heat to boiling, then reduce the heat; cover and simmer for about 10 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a strainer lined with doubled, dampened cheesecloth and let it drip for 30 minutes; if you're making jelly, don't squeeze the fruit or the jelly will be cloudy. After the clear liquid has dripped away, set it aside and squeeze the fruit into a different container; you can use this slightly cloudy juice as a beverage or for cooking. Processed this way, a quart of gooseberries will yield about 2 cups of juice.

Gooseberries freeze well. Simply wash them and remove the stems and tails, then freeze in heavyweight plastic food-storage bags or tightly lidded plastic containers.

Green Gooseberry Pie

1 pie (6 to 8 servings)

This is an old-time recipe, from back in the days when every farmhouse had a gooseberry pie cooling on the windowsill during "goosie season."

3½ cups green gooseberries (about 1¼ pounds)

1½ cups sugar

2 tablespoons minute tapioca

**½ teaspoon finely grated orange zest
(colored rind only, with none of the white pith)**

¼ teaspoon nutmeg

¼ teaspoon salt

Ready-to-use pastry for double-crust pie

1½ tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

1 egg yolk, beaten with 1 tablespoon cold water

Heat oven to 375°F. In mixing bowl, combine gooseberries, sugar, tapioca, orange zest, nutmeg and salt. Stir gently until well-mixed; set aside for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, fit one pastry into ungreased deep-dish pie plate. Scrape gooseberry mixture into pie plate. Dot with cut-up butter. Moisten edges of pastry in pie plate with a little cold water, then top with second pastry (for the most authentic farmhouse look, make a lattice-top pie; see below). Seal, trim and flute edges. Cut 6 to 8 inch-long strips in the crust. Place pie on baking sheet (to catch drips). Brush top with beaten egg. Bake until crust is golden and filling bubbles through slits, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer to rack to cool; best served warm, the day it is made.



Making a Lattice-Top Pie

When you're making a pie with a top crust, you can use a lattice top in place of the standard, full top crust; the lattice looks very pretty and homestyle. Here's how.

Fit the bottom crust as usual, and add the filling. Cut the second pastry into 1/2-inch-wide strips. Position a row of strips, running vertically across the top of the pie and separated by 1/2 inch. Now begin to weave a row of strips horizontally across the top of the pie, lifting the vertical strips over the horizontal strips in an alternating pattern. Trim all strips even with the edge of the overhanging crust, and pinch all edges very well to seal; flute edge decoratively. Brush with egg wash or any other finish as directed in the recipe; the pie is ready to be baked.