

NZ Blackcurrant Co-operative

Grower Report – May 2019 (Updated on 2019/6/14)

Blackcurrant Varieties

There are around 12 varieties of Blackcurrant grown in New Zealand. Each has their own characteristics with some being preferred for juice, others for eating whole, and some for extract powder production. Many varieties are able to be used for several purposes, but in general, varieties grown in New Zealand have been chosen for their great flavour as well as the numerous health benefits to support an active lifestyle.

We will highlight one variety in each of our growing reports.

Variety of the month – Ben Rua



Ben Rua has a moderate flavour and lower acidity, making it popular for food service uses and retail fruit packs. Ben Rua has very high vitamin C and anthocyanin levels, and because it is a great “all-rounder”, it is popular with food and juice applications as well as for powder processing.

Like wine, blackcurrants are often described by their flavour components. Ben Rua’s flavour is described by the experts as *“balanced rounded fruitiness with a gentler floral aroma”*.

The Growing Cycle

There’s a whole lot of hard work that goes into getting those tiny purple berries plumped up and ready to be made into all the good foods and drinks that we love. New Zealand is currently in the autumn period (April – June), and although it is a quiet time of the year, there is still work to do on the blackcurrant farms.

March and April are times when fertiliser is applied. Although the fruit was harvested in January, the health of the plant going into the colder months is important. The plants are still irrigated with water, as these months are traditionally dry in New Zealand. The ground for new plantings is also prepared at this time of year.

Autumn in the blackcurrant growing region of New Zealand was quite normal in 2019. Daytime temperatures were around 15-20°C, and night-time temperatures already under 5°C.



Winter is a busy period for growers. Although the plants are dormant during winter, it is the time of year when new cuttings are planted.



Older bushes are pruned in winter so that the plants will be stronger in spring. Pruning is important to remove dead wood and reduce the height of bush. Doing this important task helps establish new canes and opens up bush to increase sunlight and air circulation in the canopy (good air circulation reduces disease).

Winter chill (prolonged periods of very cold weather) is important for blackcurrants, as it helps promote good bud and flower formation in spring, which lead on to good fruit formation. Very cold weather also reduces diseases in the plants, so unlike most of us in winter-time, the growers look forward to crisp cold and chilly mornings!

Growers are reporting that the plants appear to be in good health, with good early bud growth and healthy looking plants. The cold winter days are finally here, and the chilly nights and cold days are most welcome on blackcurrant farms!

Featured Blackcurrant Grower

Name: Stuart Stephens



Stuart (left) talking with Roger Hurst (right), the senior scientist at Plant and Food. They are both drinking a juice product from Arepa!

- How long have you been growing blackcurrants?

Our family has been growing blackcurrants for 37 years

- Where is your farm?

We farm in Canterbury in the South Island of NZ in a little place called Irwell which is 20 mins south of Christchurch. The name of our Farm is Waipuna, which in Maori means spring water.

- What varieties of blackcurrant do you grow?

We grow 7 Different varieties of Blackcurrants with the main ones being Blackadder or Neuroberry has we have named it and also two other varieties; Ben Ard And Ben Rua

- What do you like about growing blackcurrants?

I like the challenge of producing a product that is very healthy and great for the consumer to eat. I also enjoy working outdoors in our special environment here in Canterbury to create the best blackcurrants that we can year after year.

- What are your interests off the farm?

I like playing sports especially tennis in the summer and coaching my kids soccer in the winter months, in between skiing and watching the All Blacks and Crusaders professional rugby team play.

- What are the challenges about growing blackcurrants?

One major challenge is dealing with the weather patterns that each different season presents, as the crucial flowering and harvest times are quite dependent on good weather to create a

successful crop. Another challenge is managing our employees to create a great team to help run the family farm.

- What is your favourite way of using blackcurrants?

My favourite way to consume blackcurrants is in our own drink called Arepa as it keeps me sharp and alert on the farm as well as tasting delicious, I also like to use the Arepa powder as part of a fresh fruit smoothie.

Stuart's Favorite

Neuroberry® is a unique variety of New Zealand Blackcurrant shown to support neurological health and reduce mental fatigue. They are a rich source of Vitamin-C and contain some of the highest levels of anthocyanins compared to any berry on earth.

Snack on these little gems or add them to your cereal, smoothies, yoghurt or raw baking.

Neuroberry® is manufactured and sold in New Zealand by Arepa www.drinkarepa.com

