



Growing Grapes

Several varieties of grapes grow quite well in our valley. Most varieties are good table or jelly grapes; none are suitable for fine wine although most will make a tolerable wine. All grow vigorous vines that will need some kind of support. They can be used to screen fencing, providing both cover and fruit. This sheet primarily covers needs for good fruit production, if you are planting grapes as an ornamental vine, you do not need to be concerned with some site selection requirements.

Grapes are more affected by various site factors than many small fruits. When you select a spot, consider elevation, air drainage and prevailing winds. Higher sights with good cold air drainage offer some frost protection by allowing cold air to drain to lower sites. Wind direction can have an effect on air drainage if the prevailing winds are blocked. Prevailing wind direction is also important for disease control. Grapes have a large leaf surface area and are very susceptible to a host of fungal diseases. Planting parallel to prevailing winds increases air circulation and can help prevent fungal problems. In addition, planting rows in a north/south direction offers the best sun exposure.

Many of the world's most famous vineyards are located in some of the world's worst soils. The highly regarded vineyards of France are mostly in poor and alkaline soil that is extremely rocky. Rich soil is not a requirement for grapes, in fact, it can be harmful. Sandy loam that is slightly gravelly is preferred by grapes. They tolerate a wide range of soil pH, from 6.0 to 7.5. Grapes require good drainage and will not tolerate standing water.

Grapes require some sort of support to grow on. This can be as simple as planting them next to a fence they can sprawl on or you can make a trellis system for them. Grapes produce heavy vines and require good sturdy support. If you are planting for fruit production, we recommend using heavy fencepost and heavy galvanized wire. An 8 foot fence post, 3 feet underground, 5 feet above ground, works well. The number of wires you will run between posts depends on the training system you use for your vine. If you are planting a small vineyard, we suggest you research this with a specialty book on vineyard cultural practices. The average homeowner wanting to use a trellis system can use two fence posts with two wires strung between. The top wire can be at about 4 feet and the lower wire can be at about 18 inches. Do not make the length between fence posts greater than 16 feet. Wire strung longer will not support the grape vine's weight especially as it grows to full size.

Grapes send out tendrils that they attach to whatever they can reach. In spring, you can tie grape vines up in the general direction you want them to grow to encourage the vine to do what you want. Typically you would encourage the vines to grow horizontally along the wires in both directions from the trunk. Do not do any pruning on your grape vines for the first two to three years to allow fruiting wood to develop.

Pruning is done in late winter to early spring and is performed to maintain the vigor of the producing wood on the vine and establish the vine's shape and form. When pruning grapes, one needs to pay attention to shaping the vine so that it can be properly positioned on the trellis and to selecting and distributing the buds with the best fruit production potential. These are typically the canes whose leaves received the most sun the previous growing season. They are usually located on the top and the outside of the vine canopy. These canes may also be darker and thicker than other growth. Because grape vines can only support so much grape production you must prune out about one half of this fruiting wood. It can seem like a lot but vines produce about twice as much wood as they can support clusters of grapes with. If you chose to do no pruning on your grapes, they will not produce as much or as large of fruit but they will produce.

Plant Land recommends a general purpose book called 'The Backyard Berry Book' by Stella Otto from Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont for more specific information about pruning grapes. Plant Land's garden experts can also help you understand grape pruning so come in to see us when you are ready to prune your vines.

Plant Land sells container grown grape vines. Plant them as soon as possible after purchasing. Dig a hole twice as wide and half again as deep as the container the vines come in. Do not amend the soil; too much nitrogen can cause problems. If the soil is excessively rocky, remove any rocks larger than a golf ball. Water the vine in well and keep the soil moist at all times. Do not prune or fertilize newly planted vines.

Grapes are hosts to a large number of pests and diseases. Prompt identification and treatment is necessary. Few organic controls are effective for grapes. They are a difficult crop to grow totally organically. The staff at Plant Land is happy to assist you. Bring in a generous sample of the affected area in a plastic bag.

Do not apply heavy applications of fertilizer to your grapes. Water is the far more important need. Fruiting grapes may need to be watered deeply every day during hot weather. A soaker hose or drip system is ideal. Good weed control is also very important. We strongly recommend mulching your grapes with small wood chips for weed suppression. Mulch also helps retain moisture especially during hot weather.



Plant Land 2023 Season Grape Selections

Concord: If you love grape juice, then you love Concord! The Seedless fruit makes full-bodied juice or your own house wine. These vines produce abundant crops that have also been used to make prize-winning jams and jellies. Exceptional hardiness, vigor, and disease resistance. Heat-tolerant. Ripens in late September. Self-pollinating. When your plant matures, it will be approximately 8 - 10' tall x 10 - 12' wide. **Zone 4**

Himrod: Highly productive vine bears crispy sweet fruit. Large handsome clusters turn golden-yellow when fully ripe. Medium-sized grapes with fine flavor. These vines yield 10-15 pounds of grapes. Seedless. Developed in New York for winter hardiness. Ripens in late August. Self-pollinating. **Zone 4**

Reliance: A juicy, deep-red grape that is flavor-packed. This variety is perfect for eating fresh or putting in fruit salads. Also makes an irresistible, healthy snack for kids. Vigorous vines produce generous clusters. Blooms late to avoid spring frosts. Seedless. Disease-resistant to anthracnose and mildew. Ripens in August. Self-pollinating. When your plant matures, it will be approximately 4 - 6' tall. **Zone 4**

Swenson Red: Bred by Elmer Swenson in Minnesota, Swenson Red is a meaty, red, table grape with a distinctive fruity flavor with notes of strawberry. Ripens up to 30 days before Concord, making it a great option for short season growers. Fruits are large, with a high sugar content, do contain seeds, and can be used to make a distinctive rose or white wine. When your plant matures, it will be approximately 8 - 10' tall x 10 - 12' wide. **Zone 4**