

Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet

Horticulture and Crop Science
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Growing Grapes in the Home Fruit Planting

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Introduction

Grapes are an excellent fruit for fresh use or processing into jam, jelly, juice, pie, or wine. In addition, grapevines can be ornamental and valuable as shade or screen plants in the home landscape when trained on a trellis or arbor. Well-grown grapevines of cultivars such as Concord can produce up to 20 pounds or more of the fruit per vine per year. Once established, well-tended grapevines can be productive for 40 years or more.

Cultivar Selection

Grape cultivars may be of the American, European, or French hybrid types. American and French hybrid types are best suited to Ohio growing conditions because they tend to be more winter-hardy. Recommended American cultivars include Concord, Niagara, Delaware, Reliance, and Canadice. Several French-American hybrids, such as Seyval Blanc and Vidal Blanc, are recommended for their wine making qualities and good winter hardiness. By selecting and planting different cultivars in the home planting, the gardener can spread the harvest over several weeks. Grapevines available to gardeners are self-pollinated or self-fruitful. Bees are not required for pollination.

Planting

Early spring is the best time to plant grapevines. Fall planting is not recommended because plants are likely to be lost to heaving during the first winter. During the first year, the soil is prepared for planting, cultivars are selected, and vines are planted, mulched, fertilized, and kept free of weeds, insects, and diseases. Prune off broken or dead portions of branches and roots. At the same time, prune top growth to a single cane. During the first year, the vines are normally tied to a stake to keep them off the ground, prevent damage, and make spraying more effective. If the season of planting is dry, supplemental watering is also necessary to keep the vines growing. It is important to get as much first-year growth as possible.

Establishment

Three years are normally required to establish a grape planting. Vines planted for training on a trellis are normally placed 8 feet apart, while those planted for training on an arbor can be placed 4 feet apart.

Pruning and Training

Annual pruning is important in maintaining a uniform yearly production of quality fruit. The best time to prune grapevines is in the dormant season after the danger of severe cold weather has past. In Ohio this is usually in March. Learning to prune grapevines requires practice and experience. Consult Bulletin 591, Growing and Using Fruit at Home and/or Bulletin 815, Grapes: Production, Management and Marketing for detailed information regarding pruning. Your local Extension office can assist you in obtaining this information. Some of the local Extension offices may also offer pruning clinics.

Fertilizer and Lime

Apply 8 ounces of 10-10-10 fertilizer per plant seven days after planting. Increase the amount of fertilizer to 1 pound of 10-10-10 in the second year and 1 1/2 pounds per vine in the third and later years about 30 days before new growth begins in the spring. Do not concentrate fertilizer at the base of the trunk. Keep fertilizer 6 to 12 inches from the trunk and spread evenly under the spread of the vine.

During the third season, some harvest may be expected from the vines. The first full crop, however, will not be produced until about the fourth or fifth year. It is important that cultural practices of maintaining soil fertility, weed control, soil moisture conservation, and insect and disease control be continued not only during the third year, but in subsequent years as well. Control weeds by hand hoeing or with plastic or organic mulch. A clean area 1 1/2 to 2 feet on each side of the vine is necessary. Do not damage trunks with a hoe or chemicals.

Summary

Home fruit growers can have a great deal of success with grape production if they know what is involved and are willing to do the work. It is also a very rewarding experience to be able to grow your personal favorite grapes that are not available in grocery stores or farmer's markets. In addition, home grape growers will get a greater appreciation of high quality grapes produced by farmers.

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