

Grape Vines for Your Home Garden



I haven't had very much personal experience with growing Grapes at home, but I can share the experience I do have. I planted a traditional Concord Grape years ago onto an arbor in my backyard. I had always enjoyed the native Grapes while growing up in New England and was looking to share this with my children. Just two years from planting we were enjoying our first Grape harvest and we continued to enjoy for many years. Grape vines can live and produce for 50 years or more with proper care.

Pennsylvania Pride grows three Grapes: Canadice, a Red Seedless; Himrod, a White Seedless; and Venus, a Purple Seedless, all table grapes although Venus has been used for Wines. Grapes should always be planted on southern slopes or southern exposures. Full sun and high temperatures are required for ripening. High ground if possible is also best to avoid cool temps in spring and fall in lower pockets. A good early season start to growth and an extended ripening season are also beneficial. Soil should be deep and well-drained to avoid standing water, although I planted my vines in shale and was very successful leading me to believe that well-drained is more important than great soil.



Plant vines 6' to 8' apart and at planting remove all canes except for the one most vigorous grower, this is the one cane that will

eventually become your main stem, the trunk and it is important to develop strength early to support the future crop. Our goal is to have one main stem to 3' then train two lateral vines and then again at 5' and train two more lateral vines. This is

the main framework of your vine. Look to set two poles about 8' apart and then attach two wires from pole to pole, one at 3' and the other line at 5'. Plant your vine in the center of the poles. Our goal is to train our vines to follow the wires at 3' and 5', all grapes will be harvested from these main branches, just four branches and one main trunk. Kind of a big double letter T.

At planting and each year just prior to bud break it is important to fertilize with a high Nitrogen fertilizer, something in the ratio of 10-5-5 and apply at very aggressive rates. Fertilizing Grapes is done just once a year at this time, about two weeks prior to bud break. Also, if your lawn is nearby, be careful of herbicides, products that control weeds, grapes are very sensitive to some of these products sold for home use. I would prefer to avoid the use of these products and enjoy a dandelion to protect my grape harvest.

Pruning: Each winter, in late winter, it is important to prune your vines aggressively returning our form to the double T and removing all other growth from the previous year and focus on our mainframe. The buds that grow from our mainframe are those that produce grapes each year. If we allow last year's growth to remain we will experience many more grapes that are smaller and much less desirable. You must return your vine to the main framework. We can allow our vines to extend along the wires the full 8', this is how we grow the bounty of our harvest each season.

All buds below the 3' wire and between that and the 5' wire should be removed as well when they appear. We want to allow only our four main vines to grow along the wires. From our main vines bud break will take place and it is on these new vines we will harvest grapes, these are also the vines

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Harvest: Grape harvest can be a little tricky, Grapes color up before they are ready for picking so it is very important to continue to taste your grapes regularly as they ripen. Grapes continue to size up and sweeten on the vine, early harvest will not produce these same results. Grapes will not continue to ripen or sweeten once harvested. Timing on harvest, pruning and fertilizing is everything with Grapes.

Pests: While Grapes can have a few problems like powdery mildew and Japanese beetle, generally in the home they are easily kept pest free with natural remedies, consult your local Garden Center. However birds may get your grapes!

Grapes are one of the first crops grown by mankind and have been in production for nearly 3000 years and are loaded with health benefits. For more information, feel free to e-mail us your specific questions. Enjoy!

- Don Eaton
Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team

