

Growing Grapes in Your Backyard



Grapes have been cultivated since ancient times. The Mission padres introduced the Mission variety of grapes to California from Mexico, but this variety was not well adapted for producing raisins, quality wine, juice, jelly, or fresh fruit for eating. Many European grape varieties, brought to California in the 19th century, have provided the basis for today's thriving grape industry. Today home gardeners still grow some very old European varieties such as Muscat of Alexandria, Ladyfinger-type varieties, and Thompson Seedless. Plant breeders have also developed some outstanding new varieties such as Flame Seedless and

Perlette.

Three types or species of grapes are available:

- American varieties (*Vitis labrusca*) such as Concord and Niagara
- European varieties (*V. vinifera*) - the predominant wine, table, and raisin cultivars grown in California
- American hybrids, which are crosses of European and American species

Generally, American types are more cold-hardy than European types. The two types also differ in their fruit characteristics and growth habits. European varieties generally require a longer growing season to mature their fruit, although most grape varieties need some summer heat to produce good-quality fruit.

Grapevines do best with full sun - about 7 or 8 hours per day. Less light leads to lower fruit production, poorer fruit quality, increased powdery mildew, and fruit rot. Grapevines will grow and produce well on a wide range of soil types, but good drainage is very important. Roots tend to grow deep - up to 15 ft. deep, although most of the roots grow in the top 3 feet of soil. Therefore, soils should be at least 3 or 4 feet deep above hardpan, stratified layer, or rock, although with careful management, 2 feet of soil can be adequate.

Large berries are desirable for table grapes, so deep and rich soils are preferred, although vegetative growth can be rampant. Table grapes also grow quite well on less fertile soils and the reduced vegetative growth may be less cumbersome.

On poorly drained soil, large amounts of well decomposed compost should be incorporated before planting. Incorporate 2 inches of compost deeply in an area up to 10 feet wide for each plant. If the soil is adobe clay or if shallow hardpan is present, consider using raised beds or planters that contain good soil.

Home grapes are often grown on arbors. Use one vine per 50-100 sq. ft. of arbor space, or more if vigorous varieties are used. A healthy vine will take up a minimum of about 50 square feet of arbor space, and vigorous varieties or vines grown on deep, rich soil should be given 75 to 100 square feet or more.

For more information on varieties of grapes and their care, go to http://ucanr.org/sites/gardenweb/Growing_Grapes_in_the_California_Garden/

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