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NEWS RELEASE

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Choosing and Planting Grape Varieties In the Home Garden

Grapevines can be an attractive alternative landscape option for the home garden. Vines not only provide lush foliage to fill in an arbor or bare fence, but they provide a sweet, tasty treat throughout the summer months. There are a couple of characteristics to consider when choosing grape varieties such as color, seedlessness, taste, ripening period and natural berry size. Listed below are several popular commercial varieties that are available for purchase from local nurseries.

Autumn Royal: This variety produces large, dark purple to black berries, which ripen in late-September to mid-October. The appeal of Autumn Royal rests on its large berry size and late maturity, as well as the fact that relatively few inputs are required for the production of high quality fruit. The natural berry size is the largest among currently available seedless cultivars. Several potential problems, including seasonal variability in production and prominent seed traces have been observed in some seasons. The fruit has shown a tendency to crack and rot following periods of inclement weather.

Crimson Seedless: Crimson Seedless is the latest ripening seedless table grape currently produced in California. It ripens in mid-October and, weather permitting, can be held on the vine through mid-November. The variety has been received favorably due to its excellent eating characteristics; Crimson Seedless berries are crisp and firm, however the berries may have difficulty developing good color. Its growth habit is vigorous.

Flame Seedless: Flame Seedless vines produce medium-sized, red, seedless berries, which are firm, crisp and flavorful. The variety is considered an early season table grape, generally ripening by early July.

Princess: The variety produces large, white berries that ripen in late August to mid-September. The berries are firm and have a slight floral or muscat character when fully mature. The appeal of Princess rests on its large berry size, late maturity and excellent eating quality. Princess's growth habit is highly vigorous.

Redglobe: Redglobe produces very large, bright pink berries with outstanding eye appeal but lacks in flavor. Fruit typically ripens from late August to early September. Growth habit is generally weak producing few shoots. The crop is variable and sometimes thinning is required to prevent overcropping on weak vines. Fruit exposed to the sun will burn, thus thin off vulnerable clusters.

Thompson Seedless: Thompson Seedless produces white, seedless berries that ripens from mid-August to September and is the most popular table grape and raisin variety. The variety is of moderate vigor and must be cane pruned to ensure adequate fruitfulness.

Home gardeners who intend to plant grapevines this season will purchase rooted dormant cuttings or green-growing potted plants from a nursery. Rooted dormant cuttings are typically planted between February and April. To ensure successful establishment of dormant cuttings, the basic rules of planting should be followed. First, pre-irrigate the area where the vine is to be planted so as to remove the air pockets in soil for better root contact. During planting, a hole should be dug deeper than the vine is long. Put the cutting in and refill the hole with one-third of the soil and pull up gently on the plant to ensure that the roots are properly angled downward. Next, tamp in the soil gently while positioning the vine, add the next third of soil and repeat. If dormant grafted vines were purchased, one should position the vine so that the graft or bud union is three to four inches above the soil line. Finally, mound over the vine with loose soil to prevent desiccation of the graft union and delicate buds. After three to four weeks, remove the soil mound and place a milk carton over the vine to protect the buds. Spring temperatures will favor shoot growth from the exposed buds; however, it is important to remember that the cold soil temperatures inhibit root growth. Root development and establishment may take several months. During this period it is important to keep the cuttings amply supplied with moisture but taking care not to over water them.

Green-growing potted plants are typically planted from May through July. Planting protocol is essentially the same as above but the vines are not mounded over. Potted vines require regular watering from the onset of planting at about one gallon per vine or two gallons every two to three days.

