



Backyard Grapes—Tips & Tricks

by Jim DeFrisco, UC Master Gardener, for the 2014 Sustainability Fair

PLANNING YOUR VINEYARD:

- Table grapes (mostly *Vitis labrusca*) or wine grapes (mostly *Vitis vinifera*).
- Site selection.
 - Lots of sun and good drainage are the most important considerations.
- Varietal selection.
 - Different varieties require more or less heat (measured in degree days) to properly mature.
 - The Winkler index (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winkler_index) was developed to help pair varietal grapes to climate.
- How many vines to plant?
 - Wine grapes produce 8-12 lbs. per vine. It takes 11-12 lbs of grapes for a gallon of wine.
 - Table grapes produce 15-30 lbs. (or more) per vine.
- Vine support.
 - Arbor, trellis, or no support (“head trained”).
 - Your desired pruning method (spur vs. cane) will guide your choice of training structure.
- Layout.
 - Allow 6-8 feet between rows, 6-8 feet between vines.

INSTALLATION:

- Prepare the soil.
 - Do a soil test if there is a history of contamination at the site. Otherwise, grapes are tolerant of a wide variety of soil types. If possible, break up compacted soil and work in amendments the fall before planting.
- Install trellis or build arbor.
 - Using a trellis puts the grapes and vines at a good working height.
 - Gadgets like Wirewise are available to make easier work of stringing and tightening wire.
- Install irrigation.
 - Drip irrigation works great for vines. Integrated drippers make running irrigation easy.
- Plant in the early spring.
 - You can plant either dormant or green growing vines.
- Training the new vine.
 - Establish the permanent structure in the first year.
 - Remove flower and grape clusters for the first year or two.



MAINTENANCE:

- Dormant pruning.
 - Prevents overcropping (i.e. a vine bearing more fruit than it can ripen).
 - Cane pruning vs. spur pruning. Remember: your desired pruning method (spur vs. cane) should have guided your choice of training structure (arbor vs. trellis).
- Thinning growth in spring / summer.
- Spraying sulfur for powdery mildew (if needed).
- Controlling critters.
 - Deer (fencing), raccoon (electric fence), birds (netting).

RESOURCES:

BOOKS

From Vines to Wines, by Jeff Cox, published 1999.

A great, very readable book on that covers both grape growing and winemaking. Lots of practical information from planning to harvest. Highly recommended.

ONLINE

UC Integrated Pest Management for Grapes

All the latest information for dealing with grape pests and diseases, including identification, prevention and treatment. The IPM website is a wealth of information for all kinds of plants.

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/FRUIT/grapes.html>

UC California Garden Web – Growing Grapes in Your Backyard

A good overview of what is involved for both table and wine grapes.

http://cagardenweb.ucanr.edu/Growing_Grapes_in_the_California_Garden/

Oregon State University – Growing Table Grapes

This is a fantastic paper to read if you are thinking about growing table grapes. Even though some of the recommendations are for the Oregon climate, most of the material is applicable to growing grapes in California. Highly recommended.

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1639>

VIDEO

How to Prune Grapes: Cane Type

Great demonstration of cane pruning by UCCE Farm Advisor Chuck Ingels.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23jHTybtCms>