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# How to Grow Grapes: The Complete Guide



Photo Credit: Pixabay

Botanical Name:	<i>Vitis spp.</i>
Plant Type:	<a href="#">Fruit</a>
Sun Exposure:	<a href="#">Full Sun</a>
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# Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Grapes

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)  
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Grapes are harvested in early fall, and then planted in the spring. Learn more about growing grapes! Not only are they a beautiful ornamental plant but also these vines produce sweet treats that are wonderful for eating, juicing, and winemaking.

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# About Grapes

Grape vines not only produce sweet and versatile fruits, but they also add an element of drama to a garden or landscape. They are vigorous growers, and with the proper pruning, they will produce fruit with ease within a few years and last for 30 years or more!

For home gardeners, there are three main types of grapes to consider: **American** (*Vitis labrusca*), **European** (*V. vinifera*), and **French-American hybrids**. American grapes are the most cold-hardy, while European grapes—usually better for wine than the table—do well in warm, dry, Mediterranean-type zones. Hybrids tend to be both cold-hardy and disease-resistant, but are not as flavorful as European grapes. Another type that is grown in the U.S. is the **Muscadine** (*V. rotundifolia*), which is native to the southern United States. The Muscadine grape's thick skin makes it best suited for use in jams, wine, or other processed grape products.

Make sure you purchase grape vines from a reputable nursery. Vigorous, 1-year-old plants are best. Smaller, sometimes weaker, 1-year-

year-old stock. Obtain certified virus-free stock when possible.

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## PLANTING

- Grapevines should be planted in **early spring after the date of the last hard freeze has passed**. Vines are usually purchased as dormant, bare-root plants.

will need more than one  
plant for pollination.

- Select a site with full sun. If you don't have a spot with full sun, make sure it at least gets morning sun. A small amount of afternoon shade won't hurt. Your soil needs to be deep, well-drained, and loose. You also need good air circulation.
- Grape vines will need to be trained to some sort of support to grow upward. This will also cut the risk of disease. The support needs to be in place at planting.
  - One option is a sturdy trellis or arbor. The arbor may have two, four or six posts, depending on whether it's attached to the house or another structure. The top can be secured with 2-inch by 4-inch wooden slats that hold the arbor together and topped with 1-inch by 2-inch wood pieces to create the latticework for the vines to grow on. You may also need corner braces to secure the whole structure. Grow the grapes, one per post, selecting the strongest cane. Allow it to grow to the top of the post the first year, securing it to the post as it grows.
  - If you are low on free space, try growing grapes on a stake. Pound in a sturdy

vertically. Let the vine grow to the top of the stake the first year, then top it.

Allow 4 to 5 side canes to grow.

Remove all the rest.

- Before planting grapevines, soak their roots in water for two or three hours.
- Space vines 6 to 10 feet apart (16 feet for muscadines).
- For each vine, dig a planting hole 12 inches deep and 12 inches wide. Fill with 4 inches of topsoil. Trim off broken roots and set the vine into the hole slightly deeper than it grew in the nursery. Cover the roots with 6 inches of soil and tamp down. Fill with the remaining soil, but don't tamp this down.
- Water at time of planting.

## GROWING

- Do not fertilize in the first year unless you have problem soil. Fertilize lightly in the second year of growth.
- Use mulch to keep an even amount of moisture around the vines.
- A mesh net is useful in keeping birds away from budding fruit.

## Pruning Grapes

Pruning is very important. Grapes produce fruit on shoots growing off of one-year-old canes. If you have too many old canes (from no pruning), then you'll get fewer grapes. If you prune back your vines completely each year, then you get lots of new growth, but again, few grapes.

Pruning is done in late winter when the plant is dormant, usually around March. But for the first year or so, the goal is to create a strong root system and trunk. Plant in spring and prune back the grapevine to three buds. Then wait until the first winter.

- **If you are growing grapes on an arbor or trellis:** Grow the grapes, one per post, selecting the strongest cane. Allow it to grow to the top of the post the first year, securing it to the post as it grows. The first winter, top the cane and allow it to grow side branches along the top of the arbor. If you let the vines just continue to grow, they will produce dense shade, but little fruit. Prune the grapes each winter by removing those canes that fruited the previous year, cutting back one-year-old canes to five to six buds, and leaving some renewal canes pruned back to two to three buds. The

canes. You want to leave enough fruiting canes on the trellis to fill it back in each summer, but not so many that it becomes a tangled mess.

- **If you are growing grapes on a stake**, cut back the side canes in the first winter to three buds on each. These will send out shoots that will produce grapes the next year. Remove all weak and spindly growth, especially along the lower parts of the trunk. The second winter, prune back the healthiest canes to six to ten buds, select two canes as renewal spurs, and prune those back to three buds on each and remove all other canes. Repeat this pruning each winter. Your trunk should be able to support four to seven fruiting canes each year as it gets older.

## Types

**Note:** Seedless varieties will produce smaller grapes.

- ‘Edelweiss’: Hardy in zones 4–7 (–20°F), early white variety. Table and wine.
- ‘Reliance’: Hardy in zones 4–8, seedless, pink table grape.
- ‘Seibel’: Hybrid, wine grape. Cold hardy.
- ‘Swenson Red’: Hardy in zones 4–8. red



- ‘Magnolia’: White Muscadine wine grape.  
Sweet. Best in zones 7–9.
- ‘Valiant’: Eating grape hardy to Zone 2.

## HARVESTING

- If grapes aren’t ripening, pinch back some of the foliage to let in more sunlight.
- Grapes will not continue ripening once picked from the vine. Test a few to see if they are to your liking before harvesting, usually in late summer or early fall.
- Grapes are ripe and ready to harvest when they are rich in color, juicy, full-flavored, easily crushed but not shriveled, and plump. They should be tightly attached to the stems. Sample different grapes from different clusters, and the taste should be between sweet and tart. Check our [ripeness guide](#) for more tips on color.
- Grapes can be stored for up to six weeks in the cellar, but grapes can absorb the odors of other fruits and vegetables, so keep them separate. Use cardboard boxes or crates lined with clean, dry straw. Separate bunches with straw or sawdust. Check often for spoilage.
- See our article on [making jams and jellies](#) with fruit from your garden.

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Grape Vine (5 plants) - row length: 20' 0"

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# WIT AND WISDOM

Grapefruit (*Citrus naradisi*) resemble grapes

plorers in Barbados to bestow this name on them.

## RECIPES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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# COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Jocelyn (not verified) 11 months 1 week ago

I just bought a grapevine from the local nursery.  
Not sure of the variety or age. How often should it  
be watered and will they grow well from as a potted  
plant vs in the ground? Thanks for any advice.

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REPLY

Kerri B (not verified) 2 years ago

Hi! I bought 2 bare root vines that only have an 8"  
bare vine stem. I planted as per the instructions  
and it has been about 5 weeks. I see no signs of  
growth. Are they slow to get going? My grapes are  
concord. Thanks for any tips!

REPLY

The Editors 2 years ago

Hi, Keri, Sorry to hear that. If you planted  
about five weeks ago, that would have

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

ommended. Did you follow the steps suggested? I looked at a coop extension service (it happens to be Minnesota) and their advice corresponds with ours (a portion follows):

## Before planting bare root vines

- Soak the roots in water for 3-4 hours.
- At planting, remove all canes except the most vigorous one.
- Plant vines with the lowest bud on the cane just above the soil surface.
- Trim off any broken or excessively long roots.
- Dig a hole large enough to you can spread the root system out.
- Then cover the roots completely with soil.

Mulching is not usually recommended for grapes because mulch will keep the soil temperature too cool. Grape vines grow best in warmer soil. END OF ADVICE EXCERPT

Give them another few weeks, especially as the air and soil warm up and see what happens. You might also contact the folks from whom you bought the roots and ask their advice.

**REPLY**

**Kerri Slayden (not verified)** 2 years 1 month ago

Thanks so much for this article! It will really help a lot when I get my new babies in the ground.

Answered all my questions. :-)

REPLY

**Keith Ellis (not verified)** 2 years 6 months ago

I have grapes grown in my garden in Poland near Warsaw they are very sweet but skins tough can I pick them and dry them and use for anything else?

REPLY

**gerald mullins (not verified)** 4 years 3 months ago

can grape vines be transplanted to another place

REPLY

**The Editors** 4 years 3 months ago

Grape growers have this advice: Transplanting of vines is easiest and most successful when the vines are

dug-up vine into the new hole. Be sure the water the soil around the vine to remove air pockets. The vine should be cut back as well to relieve stress on the root system. Keep the vine watered the first year until it becomes established enough to withstand the stresses of heat and drought.

**REPLY**

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**Kevin G Blake (not verified)** 4 years 5 months ago

I purchased a piece of property on a mountain. The side of the hill gets direct sunlight 8-10 hours a day. sandy soil. what is the best to plant in Northern CT (zone 6 I believe) and where can I purchase them? Does it always take years before you see fruit. This is for a private vineyard/jelly not commercial

**REPLY**

---

**Carla (not verified)** 4 years 8 months ago

I'm in zone 5. With less snow and rain every year...but it can get bitterly cold for up to 14 consecutive days. Is it possible to grow a mix of grape varieties on 1 arbor, a different one at each post? I



my favorite. Can you recommend any particular varieties for my zone and my needs?

Thank you

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 4 years 8 months ago

As long as your arbor is large and sturdy enough, you should be able to grow a few different types together.

As for varieties, we would recommend inquiring with your state's [Cooperative Extension](#) service. They'll have local experts who can recommend varieties best suited to your specific area!

**REPLY**

**MORE COMMENTS**

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