



LANDSCAPE  
GARDENING  
SERIES



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# Table Grapes

Grapes prefer a light soil with good drainage and moderate to high fertility. Soil should be kept moist the first year after planting, but the grapes will stand short dry periods in following years. A spring application of fertilizer (a balanced blend) is recommended. Plant grapes in early spring or winter, pruning back top growth to two or three buds at planting time. Prune roots to avoid wadding of roots in planting hole. Grapes should be planted one inch deeper than plants grew in the nursery, and spaced eight feet apart for maximum performance.

Grapes may produce an occasional fruit bunch the first year, and a good crop the second year if full sun is supplied. A southern exposure is to your advantage.

## Table Grapes

Since temperature is the main limiting factor in producing good quality sweet flavor in a cool climate area like ours, only certain early maturing varieties of table grape can be grown successfully here. For example, the most common blue grape, 'Concord', does not mature well in most areas of western Washington. In general, grapes require full sun and soils with good drainage and moderate fertility. Placing vines with a southern to western exposure, protecting them from wind, and using black mulching material or river rock under the vines to reflect heat are all methods that may help to enhance ripening. Vigorous varieties like 'Interlaken Seedless' can be very productive when trained up over an arbor, assuring that all shoots have good sun exposure.

## Arbors

Grape arbors can add both fruit and shade to the garden. With their vigorous growth, grape plants will cover an arbor in a few seasons. For consistent fruit production, however, some judicious pruning is required. Basic guidelines are similar in that you establish a main permanent trunk going up over the arbor, with short laterals or spurs from which you select the new fruiting canes each year. If too many old, non-fruiting canes have accumulated, thin about half of them out completely. In most cases a lot of new shoots will result, to provide renewal canes for the next year.

## Handy Hints

Take time to look over the vine before you start

Pick out several well-placed canes that look like good prospects.

Cut out old wood and canes that are obviously unsuitable – canes that are small and weak, or too far out from the main trunk. This will clear up some of the confusion as you go.

Always leave at least one alternative cane until the last, in case you break one.

Bend canes gradually into place before tying. Canes that grow in a direction other than where you want them can often be persuaded to cooperate by cracking them gently. Use both hands to bend the cane at the point where you want it to change direction, and apply pressure just until you hear the fibers crack.

Standing in front of a mass of tangled grape vine and wondering what to do with it can be a scary experience for the novice or even for the more experienced pruner. Keep in mind two essential ideas:

Don't be afraid to cut. When you finish, about 90% of last year's growth will be cut.

Grape plants are vigorous, and forgiving. Even if you make a mistake, you'll get a chance to fix it next year.

With that said, you can approach your pruning in a spirit of learning and adventure, not panic. Grapes are best pruned in spring (February/March, or even as late as early April) because if pruned too early a hard frost in late winter can damage the canes and buds.

### Starting Young Plants Off Right

When you get your new grape plant it probably will not be pruned; instead you will find a vigorous root system and a lot of bare shoots rising out of the top. At planting time in spring you should reduce these numerous shoots to one, and cut it back to three buds. After planting, the vine will begin to grow, and push out new green shoots. When these shoots are 8–12" long, choose the best one and support it by tying to a stake at top and bottom. Look for a strongly growing shoot, upright or nearly so, coming directly out of the old stem (not from the underground root system). Remove the other shoots.

As the shoot grows throughout its first summer, continue tying it up the stake to keep it straight and prevent breaking in the wind. This shoot will be your permanent trunk, lasting the whole life of the vine, so it pays to keep it as straight and upright as possible.

### First Dormant Pruning

Your first-year vine should have reached to or above the first trellis wire (about 30") during the previous season's growth. If it hasn't, cut it back again to 3 buds, and repeat the previous year's treatment. This may seem drastic, but necessary to establish a sound trunk. Most plants are vigorous and will reach the wire easily. If the last year's shoot just reaches the wire or a few inches beyond, cut it at the first bud above the wire and tie the shoot to the stake and the wire (A). If the shoot is longer, tie it to the stake and wire, cut the vine four or five buds beyond the tie, bend the remaining length of shoot down to the wire and tie (B). Very vigorous shoots may go well above the wire and put out strong side laterals. Choose the two laterals that are closest to the wire, tie to the wire, and prune to 3-5 buds. Tie the main stem to the wire and stake, and cut just above the side laterals (C).

During the summer, train the new shoots up to the next wire, and remove any new shoots that sprout from the root area or lower trunk.