



Grapes

Although gardening in Central Texas can be a challenge, we are fortunate that it is quite easy to grow a few varieties of grapes! All varieties we carry can be used for fresh eating, juicing, jelly-making, and wine and all are seeded.

Choosing Your Spot - Grapes need to grow in full sun, and in soil that is very well-drained to a depth of at least three feet. One way to test the soil drainage by digging a hole three feet deep and filling it with water. If all water drains out within 24 hours, the drainage is adequate. Add decomposed granite, sand, and/or compost to increase drainage. Do not plant in soil that stays wet or holds water for too long. Grapes also need to grow in a soil of low to moderate fertility, which Central Texas has plenty of. Too much fertility leads to a multitude of problems including excess vigor, poor bud fruitfulness, excessive berry drop, bud necrosis, delayed crop maturity, etc.

Soil Prep and Planting - Remember not to make it too rich. Mix in a good quality soil or compost so that the resulting blend is more than half native soil. Compost contains enough nitrogen to give the grapes a good start. At the same time, you may mix in a good mineral supplement. Thereafter, use either a light organic fertilizer at half the recommended rate or compost every spring and fall. Regular foliar sprays with compost tea can also improve overall vigor and disease resistance. New vines should be planted 8' apart, and trellised rows should be 8' apart.

Maintenance - Once you've planted your grapes, the key to good production and vine health is training and pruning. The goals are to enhance sunlight penetration and air circulation, maximize fruit production over leaf and stem growth, and to keep fruit production closer to the main stem so that sap doesn't have to travel far to grow the fruit, and you don't have to travel far to get your grapes. Vines can be trained onto a trellis, over an arbor, along an open fence, or using any number of commercial training and pruning systems. We use the Kniffen system, which is ideal for personal gardening (See reverse side for pruning and training instructions).

Pierce's disease, a bacterium that is transmitted by the sharpshooter insect, is a common dilemma with grape vines. We only carry grape varieties that are Pierce's disease resistant. However, it is important to use cultural practices that minimize possible infection. First, limit sharpshooter habitat by removing bermuda grass, perennial rye, fescue grass, blackberry, willow, native grape vines and elderberry that may harbor the bacterium. Locate your grape vine away from water sources, such as rivers, ponds, or creeks.

Grape varieties for Central Texas – Size, color, and shape of grape; Flavor of grape as fruit and/or wine; Cluster size; Ripening time; Disease and/or pest resistance; Other information.

Black Spanish (a.k.a. Lenoir) – Medium to large, blackish-blue, round berry; Very tannic and acidic, makes an outstanding port or table wine; Medium to large loose cluster; Late July or early August; Mildew resistant, susceptible to Black Rot and Downy Mildew; Heavy and regular producer; Juice is very red rather than clear in color; Requires pruning to produce good fruit and avoid overcropping; Overcropping could lead to breakage and death of the vines; Grown in Texas since the late 1800s.

Blanc du Bois – White, round berry; Good flavored grape, makes a spicy and fruity wine; Medium size cluster; Late June or July; Resistant to Downy Mildew, susceptible to Black Rot and Anthracnose especially in warm humid conditions, resistant to nematodes; Vigorous vine developed at University of Florida and introduced in 1987.

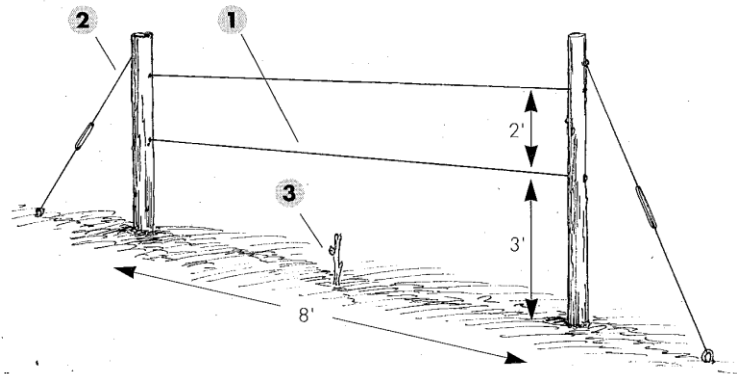
Champanel – Large, black, round berry; Delicious fruit that is very acidic until fully ripe (2 weeks after turning purple) and dry, fruity wine with a striking bouquet; Small cluster; July; Resistant to Black Rot, Downy Mildew, Anthracnose, Powdery Mildew, and all insects except the Grape Leafhopper, and tolerant of Cotton Root Rot; Extremely vigorous; May get iron chlorosis; Great for growing over an arbor, since it requires little pruning, if any; Developed by the legendary T.V. Munson of Denison, TX.

Pruning Grape Vines

Kniffen Method

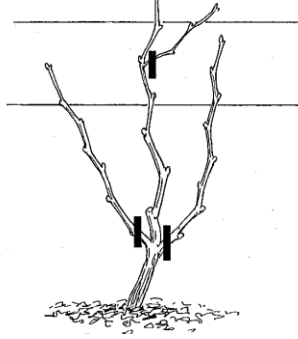
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Set up the fence. It should consist of two strands of smooth 9- or 10-gauge wire, stapled on posts set solidly in the ground and spaced about 8 feet apart. Space the lower wire about 3 feet above the ground and the second about 2 feet higher (1). Brace the posts at the ends so that the wires won't sag as they get loaded with fruit and vines (2). Plant each grapevine midway between the posts (3). Your chances for growing thrifty specimens will be improved if you plant and water carefully.

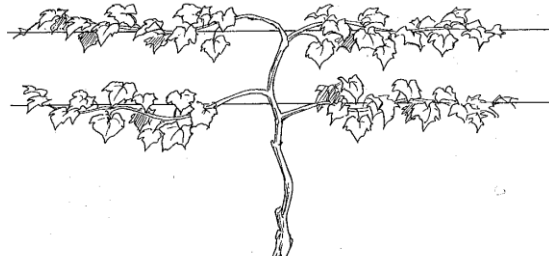


Year one:

during the first summer, allow the vine to grow naturally. Remove all side sprouts so that the vine will grow upward toward the wires.



Year two: During the second summer, by pinching and pruning, allow only two vines to grow along the wires in each direction — four in all. If the vines grow well, they should cover the wires by the end of summer. (If they grow more than this, cut back any extra growth and side branches right after the first hard frost.) The tendrils on the grapes should wrap around the wires and hold the vines securely. If any fall off and need to be tied back on, use a material like narrow plastic ribbon (not tape) that won't cut into the grape's



Year three: This is the first bearing year! Allow four more new vines to grow paralleling the first four that grew the previous season. These newcomers are your replacements for the ones that grew the second year. Let these droop on the ground until you have cut off the old vines and are ready to fasten the replacements to the wires.



Meanwhile, the year-old vines should bloom and set grapes all along the wires this summer. Don't allow too many bunches to form, because overbearing will weaken the plant and jeopardize future crops. If you're like I was, you'll be so thrilled with your first crop that you'll hate to part with any. But brace yourself and snip off a few of the clusters of tiny grapes if more than three or four bunches are forming per vine. Throughout the growing season, continue to pinch back any new growth that is headed in the wrong direction. Four new canes are all you'll need.

Year four: In late winter or very early spring of the fourth year, cut off the four canes that bore fruit the previous year, and make sure that you secure the four new canes to the wires. These will replace last year's bearing vines and produce this year's crop. Cut off all extra growth, and during the summer, pinch the new canes occasionally in order to train four more canes that will replace the ones presently bearing. Repeat this process every year.

