

# GROWING GRAPES

There are several important factors to take into consideration when deciding to grow grapes. Those factors are site and soil preparation, varieties, length of growing season, pest control and harvesting.

Your grapes need to be planted in a spot that gets full sun, but they also need to be protected from cold, strong winds. If you are going to plant table grapes (grapes just for eating or making juice, jams and jellies) they can be made part of your garden or landscape design. Grapes can be trained on a trellis, an arbor, against a fence, or along a garage wall. Grapes can be grown in almost any type of soil because they have such deep roots. However, a soil on the sandy side that can warm up in the spring and has good drainage is the best. It should be well supplied with organic matter (leaves, grass clippings, hay, etc.) to keep the soil moisture that the grape vines need to get their root system established. The ideal pH is 6.0 to 6.5, but 5.5 to 8.0 is acceptable. You should remember that grapes are a permanent crop so prepare the soil accordingly. Start preparing the place for your grapes in the fall for a spring planting. Remove large rocks and perennial weeds that would be competition for the grapes, and dig the soil amendments in deeply and throughout the planting area. Keep in mind that the roots can and will spread out in a radius of over 8 feet for each vine planted.

When purchasing your grape vines, get first-grade, one-year-old stock and plant while they are fully dormant in early spring as soon as the ground is workable. The root system should be healthy and fibrous. Cut them back 6 to 8 inches. Cut the top back so that only two nodes are left on the stem. Figure out the support system you are planning on using and set it up when you plant the vines, so you don't have to disturb the roots with future construction. You will need about 24 feet to grow two vines. Set six foot posts in the ground about two feet. Then string two strands of heavy (10 gauge) wire tightly between the posts. Place the first wire two and one half feet about ground and the second wire five feet above ground.

Now you are ready to plant the vines. Space your vines eight feet apart, dig your planting hole a foot wide and a foot deep. Add well-seasoned compost to the hole and put a 2 x 2 four foot tall stake into the hole as a temporary support for your young vine. Spread out the root system and fill with soil half way. Then water and set your vines at the same depth or an inch deeper then they will grow. Mulch the entire area with straw or shredded bark to keep the weeds down and to conserve moisture.

Some varieties for Western Washington are Interlaken Seedless, Candice, Buffalo, Lynden Blue and Reliance. If you are interested in growing grapes, the WSU Extension Office has several publications that can help you. Growing Grapes for Wine and Table in the Puget Sound Region (EB 0775) is one you might want.