



PRUNING & TRAINING GRAPES

Various trellis systems, row spacing, and canopy management techniques are available for the home gardener. The objectives are to maximize light interception by the canopy, optimize light distribution within the canopy, separate fruit from canopy and wires, and maximize yield.

Trellising

There are several dozen different trellis systems in use today. For a detailed description of each method, refer to WSU Extension Bulletin EB 0637 "[Training and Trellising Grapes for Production in Washington](#)".

Grape plants can become very heavy with wood and fruit, so a trellis must be strong and well braced. Most trellises are made with treated wood or metal posts and use 12-gauge (or heavier) wire.

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.

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.

Pruning & Training in Cold Weather Areas¹

For consistent fruit production, judicious pruning is required. Cane pruning is recommended in cold areas. There are two times per year when pruning is advised: Dormant Pruning in early spring and Summer Pruning.

Summer Pruning

The purpose of summer pruning is to thin out (remove shoots) and/or to reduce shoot length for increased light and air exposure.

First Year Summer Pruning:

The objective of training vines the first year is to get vigorous top growth and a well-established root system. Select the strongest two shoots that grow from the newly planted vine and cut all others back to the ground. Train a single shoot along a temporary wire or string until it reaches the first wire of the trellis.

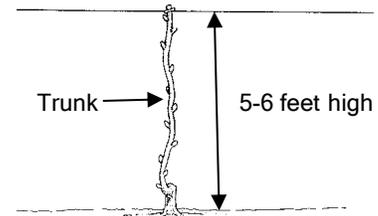
¹ WSU – Mount Vernon *Pruning Grapes in Home Gardens: Some Basic Guidelines* J. King

Dormant Pruning

The purpose of dormant pruning is to balance the leaf surface area with the capacity of the vine to produce a mature crop. Grapes are best pruned in spring (March/April, or even as late as early May) because if pruned too early a hard frost in late winter can damage the canes and buds.

First Year Dormant Pruning:

During the first year, root establishment and growth influence winter survival and should be the focus when caring for the vines. Pruning at planting time is not recommended.

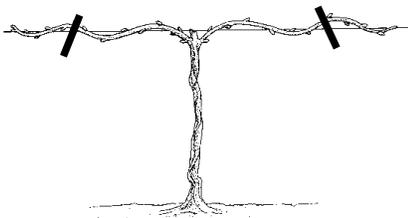


Second Year Summer Pruning (a.k.a. Training Year):

Shoots will have developed from buds on the young vine. Select two that grow a few inches below the trellis wire and train these, one on each side of the trunk, along the wire. Remove all the other shoots.



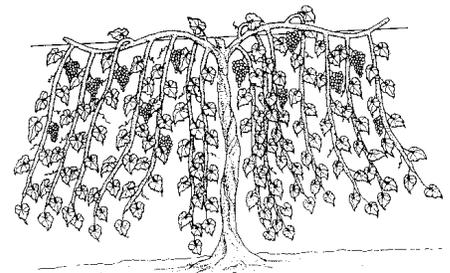
Second Year Dormant Pruning:



Shoots will have developed from buds on the young vine. Select two that grow a few inches below the trellis wire and train these, one on each side of the trunk, prune these two shoots back to 7 or 8 buds each along the wire. Remove all the other shoots.

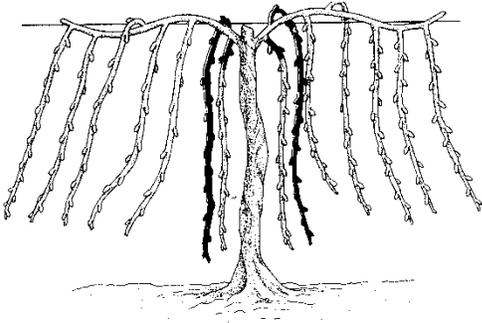
Third Year Summer Pruning:

In the third growing season, shoots grow from the buds left on the one-year-old canes and grapes are produced on these shoots. Grapes bear fruit on the green shoots that arise from one-year-old canes. Pruning is based on producing fruit in the current season, and renewing young canes for the next year.

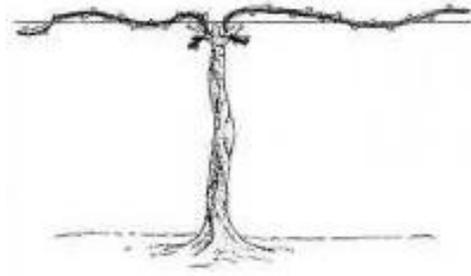


Third Year Dormant Pruning:

In the third winter, select new fruiting wood and remove all others. The two selected canes will be cut back to about 15 buds that have been exposed to good light and are at least as thick as a pencil. Wrap the canes around the trellis wire. Leave a one- or two-bud spur near the base of each cane. These renewal spurs will supply the new fruiting canes the following year.



Cane pruning, third winter before pruning
(solid color canes will be retained)



Cane pruning, third winter after pruning

Fourth and succeeding years Summer Pruning:

If plants become too vigorous, trim the shoots. Each grape shoot needs 14 to 16 well exposed leaves to properly ripen a grape cluster. The purpose of summer pruning is to balance the leaf surface area with the capacity of the vine to produce a mature crop. If too many shoots are crowded together, the leaves do not get enough light for effective photosynthesis. Laterals will grow but trim these as well.

- Begin thinning shoots as early in June or as soon as clusters can be seen.
- Shoots are soft and can easily be removed by hand. Space the shoots 3" to 4" apart.

Fruit Pruning

In our cool climate regions, crop thinning is sometimes required on certain cultivars to ripen fruit adequately, due to our limited season and heat units.

If there is more than one fruit cluster per shoot, the lowest one (closest to the old cane) will usually ripen earliest. Unless clusters are very small it's usually best to thin down to 1 cluster per shoot, especially if there are 3 or 4 clusters.

Fourth and succeeding years Dormant Pruning:

Prune yearly to remove all growth except new fruiting canes and renewal spurs. If grape vines are not pruned severely, a number of small, scraggly brunches will be produced. Words of Wisdom:

1. Don't be afraid to cut. When you finish, about 90% of last year's growth will be cut out.
2. Grape plants are vigorous, and forgiving. Even if you make a mistake, you'll get a chance to fix it next year.

Recommended Resources

Creasy, G.L. and L.L. Creasy. 2009. [*Grapes*](#). Oxfordshire, UK: CABI.

Mullins, M.G., A. Bouquet, and L.E. Williams. 1992. [*Biology of the Grapevine*](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WSU Extension Bulletin EB 0637 "[Training and Trellising Grapes for Production in Washington](#)".

WSU Extension- Mount Vernon [Pruning Grapes in Home Gardens: Some Basic Guidelines](#) J. King

