



Grapes in the Home Garden

There are many wonderful varieties of grapes that can be grown successfully in the Maritime region. Our short growing season and cold winters require that you choose varieties that are hardy to your zone and will ripen fairly quickly. Grapes can be grown by the home gardener for wines, juices, and jellies, and some varieties are even good for eating fresh from the vine. If you are growing grapes for the fruit and not for the foliage, then there are some tips that you should follow in order to get the best production.

Site and Soil

- The ideal site is located in full sunlight, protected from prevailing winds and free from late spring frosts.
- A southern slope is the best exposure.
- Grapes prefer a deep, well-drained sandy loam.
- Soil pH should be 5.5 to 6.5
- If possible prepare the soil the year prior to planting by adjusting pH, ensuring fertility, and eradicating weeds.

Establishing the vineyard

- Vigorous one-year-old plants should be planted in the spring, if possible.
- Space plants 8 feet apart in row. Rows should be 8 – 10 feet apart.
- Set plants at same depth they were planted in the nursery or container.
- Pack the soil firmly around the roots.
- Prune newly set plants to a single cane and head back to 2 buds.
- For the first season, canes that develop should be tied loosely to a stake.

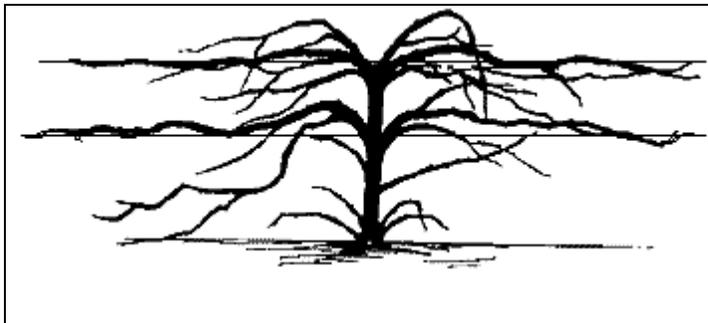


Figure 1

A vine before pruning which has been trained to the Four-Arm Kniffin System

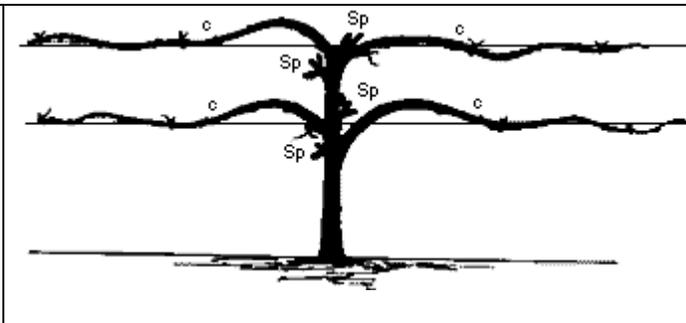


Figure 2

The same vine after pruning
Sp(renewal spur) C(fruiting cane)

Pruning and Training

- The four-arm Kniffen system (Figs. 1 and 2) is the best system for grape vines where fruit production is desired.
- This system requires a trellis consisting of firmly set, well-braced posts 10 to 15 feet apart in a row.
- Attach two strands of No.9 or No. 10 galvanized wire to the posts – one 5 ft and one 3 ft. above the ground.
- End posts should be set at least 3 feet into the ground with 6 feet above the ground. It is essential that they be well-braced to withstand pulling of the taut wire and the weight of the grape vines.
- After the first growing season choose the most vigorous cane and tie it to the top wire. This cane will become the trunk. If not long enough, tie it to the bottom wire until sufficient length is reached for tying to the top one.
- After the second growing season select 4 vigorous canes for the arms, 2 on each side of the trunk. Prune these canes to 10 buds in length and tie them loosely along the wires. For each of the 4 arms, leave 2 two-bud-long renewal spurs to produce fruiting canes for the following season. Remove all other canes.
- Each dormant season thereafter (late winter or early spring) replace the arms with canes from the renewal spurs and leave new renewal spurs.

Fertilizing

- 3 weeks after planting, apply $\frac{1}{4}$ pound of 10-10-10 garden fertilizer by scattering it in an 18-inch circle around each plant. In succeeding years, double this amount yearly until a maximum of 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of 10-10-10 (or its equivalent) is applied per vine per year.
- Fertilizer should be applied in the spring.

Weed Control

- Complete weed control around grape vines will ensure adequate vine growth and high yields. Frequent shallow cultivation is best although organic bark mulch may also be employed.

Harvesting

- Harvest grapes when fully mature.
- Fruit colour is **not** an indicator of maturity as many varieties turn colour before they are ripe. Tasting the occasional grape will give an indication of readiness.
- Also, as grapes mature, the seed colour changes from green to brown, so seed colour may be helpful in determining ripeness.