



CARING FOR GRAPES

Site planning

Grapes prefer well-drained soil - sandy loam or gravelly are the best. If you have extremely wet soil that can't be drained easily, you can build a raised bed to plant your grapes in. Grapes love rich soil so add compost for maximum benefit. Southern exposure sites are best, where the grapes can get full sun and as much heat as possible. The southside of a building or fence can offer protection from the northern wind while maximizing the sun exposure. Mulch around your grape vine to help retain moisture and add more organic material/nutrients to the soil as it breaks down. A soil PH of 6.5 is ideal – it's safe to assume you probably need some lime here in the Maritimes!

Planting

When planting your grape vine, dig your hole deeper and wider than the nursery pot your vine comes in. Place some good compost at the bottom of the hole to encourage roots to grow deep once planted. Take your vine out of the container - if the roots have started circling the pot, gently tease them outward and spread them in the bottom of the hole. Ensure the soil at the top of the pot is level with the earth you are burying it in. Pack the soil well around the roots so any air pockets are eliminated. A handful of bone meal will also aid the roots in getting established in their new location. Soak the newly planted grape vine well. Mulch can be added to help retain moisture. Water your new grape every few days if the weather is hot and dry at planting.

Pruning

For the first year, don't bother pruning your grape at all. The more leaves you have to feed the vine, the more growth potential you have. In the fall or early next spring before growth starts, remove all the canes but one or two, which will form your main scaffolding of the vine. Set them upright on a pole/trellis/fence, etc. The fall of the 2nd year, leave the main stems and trim any laterals from those main stems back to 6". As the years go by you may leave more wood each spring but the laterals should be pruned back hard to produce large clusters of quality grapes. If you don't prune you will end up with tons of grapes but they will be small. If growing your vines over a trellis for ornamental purposes, prune them back more lightly - thin out the weaker canes instead of cutting them all back.

Harvesting

Once picked, grapes don't get any sweeter - many people pick them prematurely before they have reached optimum ripeness. When a grape turns color it doesn't mean it's automatically ripe - the sugar content gradually rises in the fruit. Sample frequently to determine if they are ready to harvest! Once ripe, snip the clusters off with scissors/pruners. Grapes can keep several weeks in the fridge.

