

Growing grapes

Grapes are healthy and tasty treats that can be enjoyed fresh, dried or in the form of juice or wine. Now you can grow your own grapes at home.

Sweet, juicy and refreshing - grapes are a wonderful deciduous fruit to enjoy during hot summer days. Full of vitamins and minerals, grapes come in various sizes, colours and types and have been enjoyed around the world for centuries. Grapes are known for their versatility and are used to make juice and wine. They can also be dried and eaten as raisins.

Most of the grapes produced in South Africa are grown in the Western Cape as grapes enjoy warm days, cool nights and a low humidity. They are very sensitive to frost and require relatively large volumes of water to ensure maximum production.



Fig 1. Grape flowers

Grapes are also grown in the Northern Cape and the Limpopo provinces - however if you provide the correct conditions for grapes to grow there is no reason they will not thrive in any region in South Africa.

Grapevines are not difficult to grow –they like gravel and stony soils, where the soil drains well. They do not respond well to over- or under-watering. As they are woody climbing vines you will need to provide a strong support for your grape plant, such as a pergola or strong fence. To prevent your ripe grapes from being eaten by birds, enclose the bunches in white paper bags – don't use brown paper bags as they give the grapes a bad taste.

Planting tips

Follow these easy tips for growing delicious grapes yourself:

- Soil preparation: choose a sunny place for your grape plant to grow, where the soil drains well. Prepare a 60 cm x 60 cm hole. Mix some rich compost into the topsoil removed from the hole and put this mix back into the hole. Compost also helps soil retain water.



Image: Ex

- Plant correctly: plant the root and stem of the vine about 400 mm deep, leaving about 50 mm of stem above the ground level. Cover the exposed stem with loose soil. New shoots will force their way through the mound of soil and do not need to be covered.
- During the summer, allow it to grow unchecked. Remember to fertilise regularly but try to keep soil fertility at a moderate level - too much fertilizer will cause excessive vegetative growth while too little will decrease the plant's productivity.
- Always mulch your plants - mulch conserves soil water and is Water Wise.

Pruning grapes

- In the first winter, choose the strongest branch of your plant and cut it back to two eyes.
- Remove all other branches and when the two eyes send out new shoots, choose the most vigorous one and tie it to the support fence or pergola. Cut off the other shoot.
- As the stronger shoot grows, tie it to the support fence and pinch off side shoots at every 25 cm interval.
- When the selected shoot reaches the desired height, cut it off at this height. The two sideshoots which develop are now trained to grow horizontally outwards on each side of the main stem.
- Every winter that follows, shorten the previous season's shoots back to two eyes.



Fig 2. Young grapes

Choose the type of grape you want to grow based on what you need the fruit for e.g. selling, making wine, your own consumption. Growing your own fruit is rewarding, healthy and fun!

References:

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Report on Grapes 2012



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