

# The Culture of Grapes

## On Receipt

Remove the plant from the packaging immediately. Check the compost is sufficiently moist and water if necessary.

## Planting

Grape vines should be planted in a sheltered, sunny position, ideally a south or west facing aspect. The plants are hardy but avoid planting in frost pockets. Vines grow in most soils which should be free draining and not too fertile which would encourage growth at the expense of flower production. Apply a general fertilizer such as Growmore or Blood, Fish and Bone meal when planting. The plants should be grown against a trellis or a system of wires spaced 30cm (1') apart. The bottom wire should be 45cm (18") above soil level to protect fruit in future years. If more than one plant is to be grown space 1.5m (5') apart.

## Care of the plants

The vine should be restricted to one or two main shoots. The side shoots produced from these shoots will produce the fruit. Tie in the plants to the support wires or frame as necessary. In the first year pinch back any lateral shoots as they grow to five leaves and sub-laterals to one leaf and remove any flowers. In November or December prune leader shoots, removing half the previous seasons new growth and all laterals back to one bud.

In the second summer select lateral growths 30cm (12") rubbing out any unwanted laterals and train growth left and right, pinch out new growth as in the previous year. Pruning the main leader in the winter reducing the previous seasons growth by half.

When the plants are dormant, in subsequent years prune the leader back by half the previous years growth until the desired height is achieved. Laterals and sub-laterals cut back to one bud from the previous seasons growth. The leading shoot can then be tied into the support and treated as a lateral, cutting back to one bud of last seasons growth. In summer as the side shoots grow small flowers will appear and when they have set pinch out the shoot two leaves beyond the bunch of grapes. In the first few years allow one bunch of fruit to develop on each lateral and on mature plants two or three bunches. This will stop the plants growing and the plant will put its energies into swelling the fruit. Once the flower buds start to open until harvesting apply a high potash liquid fertilizer at two week intervals. If the fruit set is heavy the bunches of grapes will need thinning. This is carried out when the grapes are the size of peas using long bladed scissors avoid touching the young delicate fruit. This should be carried out on several occasions over 7-10 days so that remaining fruit are spaced 1cm (1/2") apart.

Grapes should be picked when fully ripe this will probably be in early October. Taste rather than fruit colour is best indicator of ripeness. Birds will eat grapes as they start to ripen and netting is the only protection.

Prune each winter and in early spring apply a general fertilizer and a 5cm (2in) mulch of well rotted garden compost.