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# Grape Expectations

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## GARDEN NOTES

# GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Though Utah is about as likely to be described as wine country as Kansas is of being called mountainous, grapes can be a colorful addition to your garden.

The basic three types of grapes are American, European and what is known as a hybrid or cross between American and European, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. American grapes, as a general rule, are hardier than European types.

One major difference between the two types is the way the skin slips off the pulp on American grapes, he explains. Generally, American grapes have a soft flesh with a distinctive, strong flavor. Concord is the most popular American grape grown in Utah. Concord grapes make great juice and, along the Wasatch front, they normally reach maturity each year. A few European grapes are grown in Utah in the warmer locations, but they generally require a longer, hotter summer to completely mature.

Most of the best wine and table grapes come from European grapes, Goodspeed says. The European variety Thompson Seedless is probably the best known table grape. Others include Tokay, Black Monukka, Flame Seedless and Emperor.

“I usually recommend American or hybrid type grapes for our area because European types do not produce fruit most years in northern Utah,” he says. “In fact, many of them die back to the ground during severe winters.

“Although not as well known, many sweet, crisp American types make great table grapes,” he says. They probably aren’t the size of some of their more famous cousins; but, in my opinion, they are every bit as good. A few of these include Lakemont, Interlaken Seedless, Himrod and Suffolk Red.”

Grapes can be decorative, Goodspeed says. Considered to be a vine, they need to grow up a trellis or other support. If that is not available, they grow along the ground until they find a telephone pole, garage, fence or old Chevy to support them. They can be aggressive plants that can grow more than six feet some years.

Grapes are normally planted in the spring when a large selection is available from the garden centers, he says. They should be planted next to a trellis or fence where they can be trained to grow. Consider using something other than a chain link fence as a support for grapes.

If they wind their way through the links, they become nearly impossible to prune.

When growing grapes, the first three years are mostly dedicated to establishing the trunk and height of the plant, Goodspeed says. After growing the vines the first year, train one of the canes (branches) upward to become the main trunk, then remove all the other canes. Once the main trunk is established, allow the side canes to grow.

“Grapes are normally produced on the year-old canes,” he explains. “The buds along the canes produce fruit and new vegetative growth. If left unpruned, grape plants could grow from one county to another; however, the further away the fruit gets from the trunk, the poorer the quality. It is best to prune grapes back in the spring.”

Once established, grapes require little extra attention, Goodspeed says. A deep watering every week or two is usually sufficient, and normally they require little, if any, extra fertilizer. In fact, sometimes the best grapes are somewhat neglected. Simply leave them alone to grow and produce fruit.

There are few diseases that attack grapes in our area, he says. The biggest problem is powdery mildew, which looks like white powder on the leaves that causes them to turn brown early and drop off. Keep the foliage dry to reduce the likelihood of this disease. There are also some registered fungicides available at local nurseries or garden centers that can control this disease.

The other major disease in our area is iron chlorosis, Goodspeed says. Aggravated by over-watering and heavy clay soils, this disease turns the leaf blades yellow, while the veins remain green. The best way to control iron chlorosis is to properly manage the water. Allow the soil time to dry between watering, and plant grapes where there is good drainage.

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