



Harvest of the Month

Grapes



Those of us in Sonoma County and the surrounding area are quite accustomed to seeing grapevines, as we live in one of the top wine grape producing regions in the world. But where good wine grapes grow, good fresh eating grapes grow too! A couple grape vines are a wonderful addition to a school garden, giving you a lot of tasty fruit to eat during the first couple of months of the school year!

Botany

Most domesticated grapes come from cultivars of *Vitis vinifera*, a grapevine native to the Mediterranean and Central Asia. One important exception in the U.S. is the Concord grape which was developed from the native *Vitis labrusca*.

There are a number of *Vitis* species native to North America, with different species occurring in different regions. California has *Vitis californica*; its edible purple fruit ripens in late Summer and its large leaves turn brilliant shades of orange and yellow in the Fall.

Uva means grape in Spanish.

Fun Fact #1

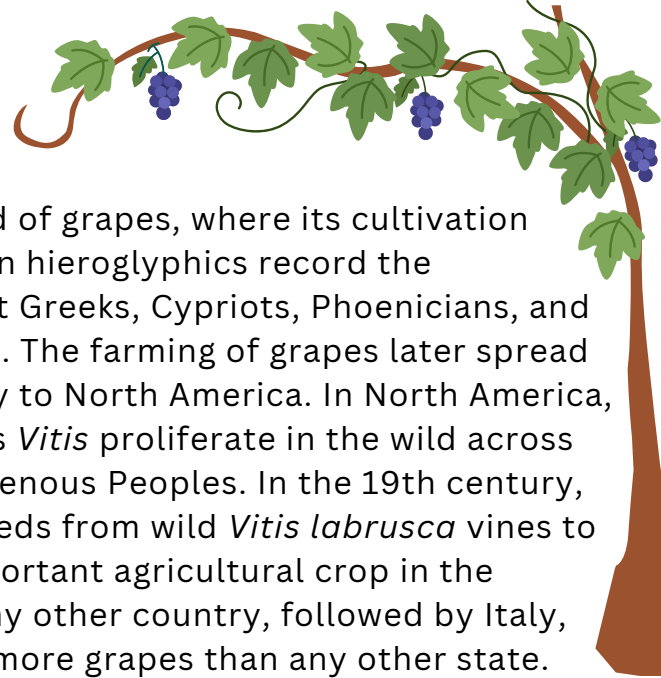
Kyoho, a large-berried, sweet purple grape originating from East Asia and Thompson Seedless, a large green variety also known as Sultana, are the most widely cultivated grapes in the world. The other cultivars in the top 10 list are all wine grapes.

Fun Fact #2

Approximately 71% of world grape production is used for wine and juice, 27% as fresh fruit, and 2% as dried fruit.



Social Sciences



The Middle East is generally described as the homeland of grapes, where its cultivation began around 6,000–8,000 years ago. Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics record the cultivation of grapes, and history attests to the Ancient Greeks, Cypriots, Phoenicians, and Romans growing grapes for eating and wine production. The farming of grapes later spread to other regions in Europe, North Africa, and eventually to North America. In North America, native grapes belonging to various species of the genus *Vitis* proliferate in the wild across the continent and were a part of the diet of many Indigenous Peoples. In the 19th century, Ephraim Bull of Concord, Massachusetts, cultivated seeds from wild *Vitis labrusca* vines to create the Concord grape, which would become an important agricultural crop in the United States. Today, China grows more grapes than any other country, followed by Italy, France, Spain, and the United States. California grows more grapes than any other state.

Nutrition



Grapes are a refreshing, hydrating fruit packed with essential vitamins and plant compounds. They contain Vitamin K for bone health, Copper for energy production, Potassium to help manage blood pressure and Vitamin C for immune support. They also contain Resveratrol, an antioxidant found mostly in red and black grape skins that protects heart health; and flavonoids and polyphenols that lower cell damage and reduce inflammation.

Table vs. Wine Grapes

Commercially cultivated grapes can usually be classified as either table or wine grapes, based on their intended method of consumption. While almost all belong to the same species, *Vitis vinifera*, table and wine grapes have significant differences, brought about through selective breeding.

Table grape cultivars tend to have large, seedless fruit with relatively thin skin. Wine grapes are smaller, usually seeded, and have relatively thick skins (a desirable characteristic in winemaking, since much of the aroma in wine comes from the skin).





Grape Salsa Recipe

Growing Tips

Obviously, grapes grow well in our region of Northern California. But a little thought must be given to cultivar selection depending on the microclimate of your garden. In the more inland areas, cultivars such as Flame Seedless, Thompson Seedless, Princess, Black Monukka and Thomcord do well. Closer to the coast look for cultivars such as Campbell, Cardinal, Moore, Perlette, Reliance and Interlaken.

Planting

Grapevines are normally planted in the Spring. The vines can be bare root or potted. Spacing will depend on your trellising method, but each plant will usually need at least 6 feet of space. Have your vine supports in place before planting. You can use a stake if no other support is available. Right after planting, prune back to the best cane with 2-3 healthy, living, fat buds (nodes). After shoot growth begins, remove all but two of the strongest shoots. Remove all the flower clusters the first growing season. The goal in the first year is to establish the plant with strong roots and a straight trunk. Water after planting.

Care

The most important part of grapevine care, aside from regular water and appropriate fertilizing, is the pruning. Grapevines must be pruned during the dormant season each year. Pruning maintains the vine's form, size, vigor, and next season's fruiting wood. Grape vines produce more wood than necessary and typically 70-90 percent of the new growth is removed on a mature vine, leaving just a few buds on each cordon. Summer removal of excessive leaf growth is also recommended in order to maintain good air circulation around the plant to reduce the chances of fungal disease.

Harvest



Grapes do not ripen once off the vine, so be sure to wait until they are fully ripe before harvesting. Do not use color as your only indicator of ripeness, because some cultivars color up a week or more before they are fully sweet. Once the cluster stems begin to turn brown the grapes should be ripe. You can always pick one and do a taste test if you are unsure! When they are ready to harvest, use clippers or a sharp knife to cut the clusters off the vine. If you are not eating them immediately they will keep in the fridge for up to two weeks.