

## **Planting and Caring for your Grapes**

### **SOIL:**

Grapes will thrive in average garden loam. Sandy loam and gravelly or clay loams are especially recommended. Can add aged compost including bone meal if you have it.

### **CULTURE:**

Two-year vines are best for planting. Plants may be set as soon as ground can be worked in the spring. Holes should be 12-14 inches deep and 16 inches in diameter in 8 to 10 feet apart. Setting a trellis for grapes is easy. Station wooden posts solidly in the ground about 8 to 10 feet apart. String 9 or 10 gauge wire about 3 feet above the ground and the second wire about 2 feet higher. Brace the posts at the ends so that the wires won't sag as the vine grows. Plant each grapevine midway between the posts.

### **PRUNING:**

The real key to growing grapes is pruning. Proper pruning will maintain the balance between can growth and fruit production. The following is the Kniffin system which is the most popular system used in our area.

#### **First Year:**

After planting allow vine to grow naturally. Shoots will arise from the buds. Select the most vigorous shoot and tie it loosely to a temporary stake next to the plant. Remove other shoots. The selected shoot will become the permanent trunk of the vine. Before the second spring, erect a permanent trellis.

#### **Second Year:**

How much pruning depends on how the vine grew the first year. By pinching and pruning, allow only two vines to grow along the wires in each direction- four in all. By the end of the summer the vines should cover the wires, if more, cut back extra growth and side branches right after the first hard frost. The tendrils on the grapes should wrap around the wires and hold the vines securely. If any fall off and need to be tied back on, use a material like narrow plastic ribbon (not tape) that won't cut into the grape's tender bark.

#### **Third Year:**

This is the first bearing year. Let four more new vines grow parallel to the first four from the previous year. These will replace the ones that grew the second year. Allow new vines to droop on ground until you have pruned old vines and are ready to fasten the new vines. Meanwhile, the year old vines should bloom and set grapes all along the wires this summer. Don't let too many bunches form, (more than 3 or 4 bunches per vine) overbearing will weaken the plant. Continue to pinch back any new growth that is headed in the wrong direction. Four new cans are all you will need.

#### **Fourth Year:**

In late winter or very early spring, cut off the four canes that bore fruit the previous year, and secure the four new canes to the wires. These will replace last year's bearing vines and produce this year's crop. Cut off extra growth, and during the summer, pinch the new canes to train four more canes for the next year. Repeat this process every year.