

Grapes were one of the earliest plants cultivated by people, and advances in grape cultivation continue to this day. Grapes are native to Florida, but the earliest settlers of the state found the fruit to be small, thick-skinned, seedy and semi-sweet to downright sour. As a result of continued cultivation, especially over the last 100 years, many excellent varieties are now available to the Florida grower. In fact, second only to citrus, grapes are the most foolproof Florida fruit crop. You don't even need an arbor to grow them—grapes can be grown along a fence or can be trellised against the wall of a house.

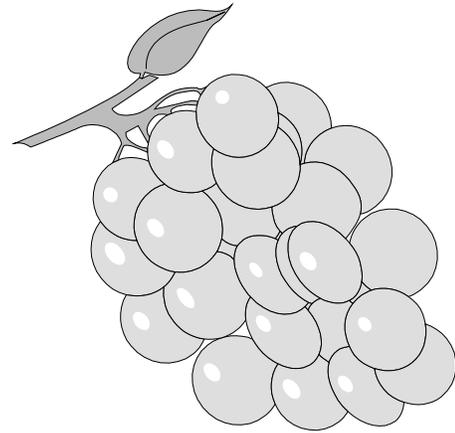
Three types of grapes can be grown in Florida. The easiest and most common is the **muscadine**: sweet, juicy, bronze or black, disease-resistant grapes. Some varieties are best when eaten fresh; others are more suitable for wine. Some people dislike the thick, tough skins, but most savor the sweet flavor of the juicy pulp and then discard the seeds and skin. Muscadines are picked individually from large clusters from July to September. Some varieties are perfect flowered (both female and male reproductive portions are present) and do not require a pollinator. Others, however, have only female flowers and must be planted with self-fertile varieties. The two plants must be planted within 25 feet of each other. As a general rule, when a larger number of grapes are planted, every third plant should be a self-fertile variety to assure good fruit production.

**Bunch grapes**, the classic, thin-skinned grapes that are grown and picked in big clusters, ripen in June and July. The best adapted Florida varieties are green, red, blue or purple. They are more susceptible to disease than muscadines, but they are worth the effort if you don't mind spraying. Most varieties are self-fertile; no pollinator is needed.

The best grapes for Florida are probably the **Bunch x Muscadine hybrids**. Developed by the University of Florida, these grapes combine the best characteristics of both parents: big clusters of sweet, thin-skinned black grapes, and they have beautiful, disease-resistant foliage. So far, the Southern Home is the only variety in this group.

### Planting

Best growth can be expected when plants are set in full sun in well-drained, improved soil with a slightly acid pH. Bunch grapes should be planted 10 feet apart; muscadines should be planted every 15 to 16 feet. Water plants thoroughly every day for the first week. For the next two to four weeks, water at the rate of two to three thorough waterings per week. Then, watering every three to four days is enough. Grape vines have a



shallow root system so cultivation should be as shallow as possible. Apply a mulch to stretch the time between waterings and to discourage weeds.

### Trellising and Pruning

Grapes require a strong support. This can consist of two 9-gauge galvanized horizontal wires about 3 and 6 feet from the ground. These should be supported on strong 4x4 pressure treated posts placed 18-20 feet apart. (See illustration on back.)

For best productivity, vines must be pruned, preferably between January 1 and February 15. During the first growing season, promote development of the main stem by removing all side shoots as they appear. This stem will eventually become the trunk of the vine. When the vine reaches the first wire, select the two strongest side shoots to train in opposite directions on the wire. After the first year, each lateral arm should be pruned back to 3 to 5 buds.

### Fertilizing

Grapes should be fertilized three times during the growing season. In March, June and early September use Sunniland 6-6-6 and apply 1/4 pound per vine during the first year. Scatter fertilizer 12 inches from the base of the vine. Increase fertilization rates in following years, but do not exceed 4 pounds per vine per year.

# Rockledge Gardens

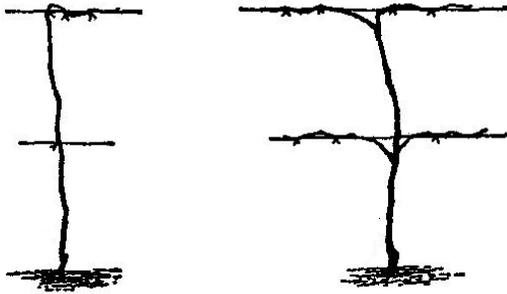
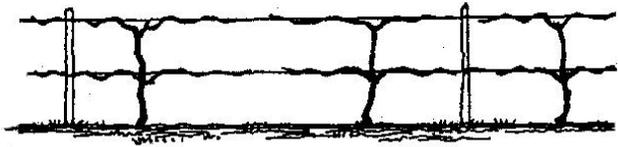
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## Plant Problems

Muscadines are easier to grow than bunch grapes, but they still must be protected against fungus problems and other pests. Spray with a fungicide such as liquid copper every 2 weeks from the time the flowers appear until the fruit begins to ripen. This will prevent fruit rot

and leaf spot. Spraying is even more important during the rainy season and should be continued every 2 weeks until the wet season ends. Spraying with a regular insecticide such as spinosad or pyrethrins is also advised, except when the vines are in bloom. Spraying then would kill pollinating insects.



## Grape Pruning (Kniffen System)

**(1) Trellis for Kniffen system: wires 3 feet and 6 feet above ground; posts are placed 15 to 20 feet apart**

**(2) One-year-old grapevine after being pruned, tied in three places to top wire**

**(3) Two-year-old vine after being pruned: 5 buds left on each lateral cane on top wire; 4 buds on each at bottom wire**

Variety	Pollination	Color	Ripens	Best Use/Comments
<b>Muscadine Grapes</b>				
Alachua	self	black	August	eat; excellent flavor; productive; good disease resistance
Albemarle	self	black	August	juice/jelly/eat; excellent flavor; high sugar content
Carlos	self	bronze	August	wine/eat, similar to Scuppernong; vigorous & productive; 16%
Chief	self	black	September	
Cowart	self	black	August	wine/eat; large; good quality; vigorous, productive; disease-resistant; 19%
Delicious	self	black	August	eat/wine; exceptional taste; high yields; disease-resistant; 2007 UF release
Dixie	self	bronze	September	wine/eat, excellent flavor; vigorous, productive & disease-resistant; 22%
Doreen	self	bronze	August	eat/wine; medium size
Fry	female	bronze	August	eat, very large fruit; moderately vigorous; good producer; 21%
Granny Val	self	bronze	August	eat; large
Higgins	female	bronze	September	eat/wine; large; good quality; moderately vigorous; productive; 17%
Hunt	female	black	September	jelly/wine/juice; vigorous; very productive
Ison's Black	self	black		eat/wine; large fruit
Jumbo	female	black	September	juice/jelly/wine/eat; jumbo; delicious; productive; disease-resistant; 16%
Magoon	self	black	Aug-Sep	eat; good quality; highly productive; vigorous; very high sugar content
Nesbitt	self	purple	August	eat; large fruit, good quality; medium vigor; high production; 20%
Noble	self	black	Jul-Aug	wine/juice/jelly/eat; good quality; medium vigor; high production; 18%
Pink Hunt	female	pink	September	jelly/wine/juice; vigorous; very productive
Scuppernong	female	bronze	September	eat; medium-large; sweet, distinctive flavor; vigorous & productive; 17%
Southland	self	black	Aug-Sep	eat, very sweet, disease-resistant
Summit	self	bronze	June	wine/eat; large; delicious; vigorous, productive & disease-resistant; 20%
Tara	self	bronze	Jul-Aug	eat; large fruit
Triumph	self	bronze	August	eat/wine; large
Welder	self	bronze	August	wine/juice/jelly; good quality
<b>Bunch Grapes</b>				
Blue Lake	self	blue	July	juice/jelly/eat, tart & spicy; dooryard
Conquistador	self	purple	July	good for all uses; pick your own; fresh market; wine
Daytona	self	pink	July	eat; delicious flavor; dooryard
Lake Emerald	self	golden	July	wine/eat, jelly semi-sweet, vigorous
Orlando	self	green	June	seedless
Stover	self	golden	July	eat/wine; dooryard; fresh market
Suwanee	self	light green	July	eat/wine; pick your own
<b>Bunch x Muscadine Hybrid Grapes</b>				
Southern Home	self	black	Jul-Aug	eat; excellent production, vigorous; medium size