GRAPE CULTIVARS
FOR YOUR HOME GARDEN

B.C. STRIK

There are essentially three types of grapes available in Oregon:

- American (Vitis labrusca), including Concord and Niagara;
- European (V. vinifera), which are the predominant commercial wine cultivars (varieties) in Oregon; and
- French-American hybrids, which were developed from crosses of European with American species.

Many of the American cultivars, also called “labrusca” types, have a strong, characteristic “foxy” (musty) flavor and aroma. Therefore, these cultivars are mainly used for juice rather than wine. However, many people like the foxy flavor and enjoy eating fresh fruit from these cultivars. Labrusca types were developed mainly in the eastern United States and may be hardy to –10°F.

European grape cultivars differ from American cultivars in fruit characteristics, vine growth habit, and climate adaptation. European types of vinifera, have loose clusters of grapes that are usually thin-skinned with a winelike flavor. Vinifera require at least 160, but preferably 200 or more, frost-free days to mature fruit. Plants are likely to be damaged below temperatures of 0°F.

Vinifera cultivars require more heat units for fruit maturation than labrusca types. In general, vinifera can be grown well in areas with more than 1900 degree days or heat units.

A

TABLE GRAPES

Red

Caco (A). Mid- to late-season. Fruit medium-sized, red. Fruit has a slipskin (the pulp slides easily out of the skin). Berry skin is tough. Clusters compact. Flavor is medium-sweet and foxy. Fruit keeps well in cold storage and is good for juice. Plants are hardy.

Canadice (A). Early season. Fruit medium, red, and seedless, borne on compact clusters. Skins are relatively thick, but slipskin is moderately tender. Fruit can be stored for relatively long periods and is good for raisins. Plants are hardy, resistant to phylloxera, and very productive.

Catawba (A). Late season (grow only on the warmest sites). Fruit large, round, coppery-red. Flavor is slightly foxy, aromatic, and winelike. Fruit can be used for home wine production. Plants are moderately hardy.

Delaware (A). Early to mid-season. Fruit medium, round, red. Custers small. Flavor is good fresh, but fruit is also good for wine. Plants are susceptible to powdery mildew and require a well-drained soil.
Einset seedless (E). Early. Fruit medium, oval-shaped, red, seedless. Fruit resists cracking and doesn’t have a slipskin. Clusters loose, but well-filled. Flavor is fruity with a mild labrusca and strawberry character. Fruit stores well. Plants are hardy with good productivity.

Flame seedless (E). Early. Fruit small to medium, round, red, seedless. Clusters medium and loose. Flesh is firm and crisp. Excellent flavor for dessert grape. Susceptible to powdery mildew. Plants are very productive when cane-pruned.


Suffolk red (A). Early to midseason (ripen a few weeks before Concord). Fruit medium, red, seedless. Clusters loose. Good to excellent for fresh consumption. Plants are moderately hardy.

Utah Giant (E). Midseason. Fruit large, round, blotty red. Clusters large and loose. Flesh is firm and crisp. The fruit is like that of Tokay and is suitable only for dessert. Plants are very susceptible to powdery mildew.

Vanessa seedless (A). Early to midseason (10–14 days before Concord). Fruit medium, oval, red, seedless. Clusters compact. Flesh is crisp with a good flavor, not muscat type. Plants are moderately hardy and productive. Interlaken, Lakemont, and Himrod.

What if you find a cultivar (variety) that’s not on this list?

Find out some of the plant growth and fruit characteristics:

- What color is the fruit?
- Is the fruit best suited for fresh consumption, juice, or wine?
- When does the fruit mature (if it’s late-maturing, it may not mature properly in your area)?
- Is it a European, American, or French-American hybrid (European and hybrids should usually be cane-pruned)?)

Remember: If you purchase a cultivar that’s not on this list, it has probably not been extensively tested in Oregon. It’s best to try a plant in your garden first, to see if it grows well, if the fruit matures, and if you like it.

Golden Muscat (H). Mid- to late-season. Fruit medium to large, yellow-green. Flavor is of the characteristic muscat type. Slipskin is slightly tough. Flesh juicy, soft, sweet, aromatic. Good dessert grape.

Himrod (H). Early. Fruit small, greenish-yellow translucent, seedless. Non-slipskin is tender. Clusters long and loose. Fruit is excellent fresh and for raisins. Plants are moderately hardy and productive.

Interlaken (H). Early. Fruit small, greenish-white, seedless, non-slipskin. Smaller, more compact cluster than Himrod. Excellent flavor with a hint of foxyness and good quality for fresh and raisin grape vines are vigorous with moderate productivity. Plants should be cane-pruned for maximum productivity.

Lakemont (H). Late-season. Fruit small medium, seedless, yellow color. Non-slipskin, tender than others. Good size. Flesh is firm and juicy and good for raisins. Plants are more hardy than Interlaken and Himrod.

Niagara (A). Late-season (few days before Concord). Fruit large, green-white. Clusters large and compact. Flavor is sweet with the foxy characteristic of the labrusca type. Fruit can be eaten fresh or used for juice and wine. Plants are less hardy than Himrod and more hardy than Interlaken. Productivity is good.

Perlette (E). Midseason. Fruit medium, white to yellowish, translucent, seedless. Clusters are large and very compact. Skin is thin and tender. Flavor mild, but distinctive. Vines are vigorous and productive.
This publication is out of date. For most current information:
http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog

**Blue**-**black**

**Blue** (A). Midseason. Fruit medium, black. Clusters medium, compact. Flesh tender, juicy, sweet, very little foxy flavor. Quality is fair.


**Blue** (A). Midseason. Fruit medium to large, reddish-black, heavily bloomed. Clusters medium to large and well-filled. Slip skin, tough and thick. Flesh is greenish, translucent, medium juicy, tender, sweet, not aromatic, tart with pleasing flavor. Quality of seed size is medium. Vines are vigorous, productive and hardy.

**Blue** (A). Midseason. Fruit medium to large, black, slipskin. Clusters medium large and tight. Flavor is sweet, bland, and juicy. Vines are moderately vigorous, and very productive.

**Blue** (A). Early. Fruit medium, black, slipskin. Clusters medium and well-filled. Flesh is juicy, sweet, and foxy. Quality of unfermented juice is similar to Concord. Fruit has poor keeping quality. Good for dessert and juice. Plants are fairly vigorous, hardy, and moderately productive.

**Blue** (A). Early. Fruit medium, blue-black, seedless. Cluster varies from a hint of muscat to slightly foxy. Vines are vigorous, hardy, and moderately productive. May require bunch thinning to improve fruit quality.

**WINE GRAPES**

The main wine grape cultivars grown in Oregon are: Pinot noir, Chardonnay, White Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Cabernet Sauvignon, Muller-Thurgau, and Sauvignon blanc. Harvest typically begins in late September to early October and ends near the end of October or when fall rains arrive.

You can grow many of these cultivars well in your home garden, provided you properly prune, train, and otherwise care for them. Late-maturing cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon should only be grown on properly selected, warm sites. Most cultivars are susceptible to powdery mildew.

Chardonnay. White. Clusters are small to medium and well-filled. Berries are small, usually with one seed. Flesh is soft and juicy. Skin is tough and translucent. Riped fruit is susceptible to spoilage by mold or rot once fall rains begin. Cane-pruning is recommended. One of the earliest cultivars to begin growth in spring, so it’s susceptible to frost damage on cool sites. Well-drained soils best.

Avoid high nitrogen fertilization— it promotes poor fruit set, fruit rot, and delays maturity. Fruit makes a table wine of high quality with a distinctive flavor.
Cabernet Sauvignon. Red. Clusters are medium, long, and usually loose. Berries are small, black, with a whitish bloom. Ripens late (around the last week of October). Plants are vigorous with low to moderate productivity. Relatively low incidence of fruit rot.

Gewürztraminer: Reddish-brown. Clusters are small to medium and compact. Berries are small with firm pulp and rather thick, tough skins. Flavor is characteristically spicy. One of earliest cultivars to mature. Time of harvest is very important: It lacks varietal character if picked too early, and it lacks acid if picked too late. Cane pruning is recommended.

Prefers deep, fertile soils. Excess nitrogen fertilization causes poor set and delays maturity. Early growth in spring increases susceptibility to frost damage. Produces a distinctive white varietal table wine with a spicy, aromatic, muscatlike aroma. The wine matures rapidly and does not retain quality for long.

Marechal Foch (Foch). Red. French-American hybrid. Clusters are small and rather loose. Berries are small, blue-black. Fruit ripens early (4 weeks before Concord). Wine is of good quality, but with a slight herbaceous taste. Plants are very vigorous, with low to moderate productivity.

Müller-Thurgau. White. Clusters are small to medium and compact. Berries are small. Ripens early. Vines produce heavily. Wine has a distinctive character and a fine balance of acidity, flavor, and aroma. Wine is not as good as Riesling, but this cultivar can be grown in areas where Riesling doesn’t often mature. Vines grow best on fertile soils that are not dry or calcareous. Vigor is low to moderate.

Pinot gris. White. Clusters are medium and compact. Berries are gray-blue, small to medium in size. Ripens early and produces a white wine with a distinctive, complex flavor. Grows on most types of well-drained soils and has drought tolerance.

Pinot noir. Red. Clusters are small and compact. Berries are small, blue-black, with large, numerous seeds. Fruit ripens early (around October 1) and if picked at the proper maturity produces wine with excellent aroma, flavor, and a soft finish. But the grape quickly if damaged by birds or insects. The vigor is moderate, yields are low to moderate. Plants grow best in well-drained, deeper soils. Sauvignon blanc. White. Clusters are small to medium and compact. Berries are small to medium size. Ripens mid- to late season. Must be fully ripe to achieve true varietal character to the wine. Early growth in spring may increase susceptibility to frost damage.

Mature fruit are quite susceptible to bunch rot. Deep fertile soils tend to produce excessive growth and poor crops. Plants grow best in sandy loams.

White Riesling. White. Clusters small. Berries small to medium, greenish-yellow, with brown speckles. Skin is fairly thick and moderately tough. Flavor is somewhat aromatic. Ripens late, but does produces a good quality wine when harvested at less than optimum maturity. Vines are moderately vigorous. Bunches are susceptible to Botrytis bunch rot.

FOR FURTHER READING

The publication listed below, and the one you’re holding, are available from Publications Orders, Agricultural Communications, Oregon State University, Administrative Services A422, Corvallis, OR 97331-2119.

EC 1305, Growing Grapes in Your Home Garden, by Bernadine C. Strik, Oregon State University Extension Service publication (Corvallis, reprinted April 1993). $1.50