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Master Gardener Corner: Table Grapes for the Home Garden

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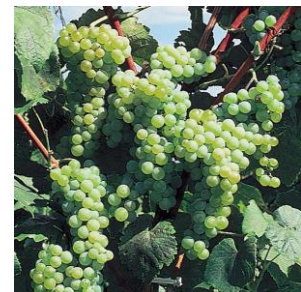
Grapes are widely grown throughout the world. Grapes are native to North America, unlike many other fruit crops. Growing a few grape vines in the backyard can give you a supply of fresh grapes for eating, to make juice, jelly, pies or even your own wine. Home gardeners can choose from a wide variety of grape cultivars, each differing in fruit size, color, flavor, time of ripening and winter hardiness.

Seedless table grapes are one type of grape that can be grown in the home garden. How seedless a grape is varies among varieties. Most seedless grapes have vestigial seed traces that range in size from very small to large and noticeable. Seed traces in berries of the same variety may vary in size and in the hardness of their seed coats. Climate also affects seed trace size.

California accounts for 99 percent of all U.S. commercially grown table grapes. The green 'Thompson Seedless' is the dominant U.S. variety that we see in the store. Belonging to the *Vitis vinifera* species, 'Thompson Seedless' grapes are hardy in zones 7 through 9. They are not hardy in Western New York as our cold hardiness zones range from 5 to 6.

Since the trait of seedlessness originated in cultivars that are not winter hardy, such as 'Thompson Seedless', many of the seedless varieties out there are not winter hardy in our area. Fortunately grape breeding programs in New York, Ontario, Arkansas and elsewhere have produced seedless grapes with improved cold hardiness. This allows home gardeners to grow their own seedless grapes if they have a good site. While very flavorful, homegrown seedless grapes may be smaller than those found in the grocery store.

'Himrod' is the most successful table grape released from Cornell University's grape breeding program. It produces large bunches of white seedless grapes that turn golden-yellow when fully ripe. It has a honey like flavor and a melting, juicy texture. Vines yield 10 to 15 pounds of grapes and ripen in late August. It has moderate disease resistance.



*'Himrod' grapes
Source: starkbros.com*

'Canadice' is more winter hardy than most seedless grapes, although trunk injury has occurred on some sites. It produces medium clusters with small red berries that are sweet, with a great grape flavor and a unique hint of spiciness. The vines can be extremely productive as clusters (6 to 8 inches long) may average half a pound. Fruit rot is a problem in wet years because the clusters are compact. This grape tolerates a wide range of soil conditions, but must have good drainage. Ripens in mid-August and can be picked through September.

'Einset Seedless' is a winter-hardy, red seedless grape with a unique, strawberry-like flavor. The medium-sized clusters produce bright red berries that have good storage potential until the end of November. The skin is slightly tough and adheres to the tender flesh. Cultural problems include susceptibility to fungal diseases and a seed remnant that is occasionally noticeable.



'Remaily' seedless grapes
Source: starkbros.com

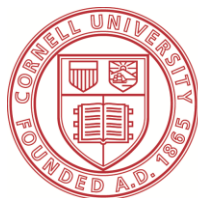
'Reliance' is from the University of Arkansas grape breeding program. Cold hardiness is among the highest of the seedless varieties. It produces large clusters of round, red, medium-sized berries. The skins are tender and the flesh has a sweet grapey flavor. It blooms late to avoid spring frosts. It has disease resistant to anthracnose and mildew. Grapes ripen in August.

'Remaily Seedless' was developed by the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. It produces large clusters of oval seedless berries with a firm texture. The flavor is mildly fruity. The berries turn to gold at full maturity. The skin is adherent, slightly tough and resistant to cracking. The clusters are very attractive in appearance but are subject to bronzing where exposed to sunlight. The vines are moderately cold hardy. This variety is recommended for gardeners interested in a grape tasting similar to 'Thompson Seedless'.

Many grape varieties turn color before they are ripe so the best way to tell if they are ripe is to taste them. Grapes do not ripen off the vine. Picking too late can reduce the fruit storage life. To harvest, clip full clusters off the vine with pruning shears. Handle grape clusters carefully. Remove any discolored, injured, or undesirable berries. Cool them as soon as they are picked. Store grapes in a refrigerator. Cover grape clusters loosely with plastic to reduce moisture loss. Most grapes can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week or two.

Gardeners may enjoy experimenting with seedless grapes if they have a suitable growing site – full sun, good air drainage and deep, well-drained soils.

Resources for this article include: Cornell University, Michigan State University, University of California, University of Minnesota and Stark Bro's.



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
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