

NEWS RELEASE
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PRUNING GRAPES

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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Grapevines need to be heavily pruned each year to produce large, good-flavored fruit and to maintain vigorous growth. You should normally prune your vines in winter, after they have lost their leaves and are in a dormant condition. In some of Mariposa County's higher elevations, where spring frosts are common, you may want to wait until the new growth just starts. Pruning at this time delays growth of the remaining leaves and shoots, and may help to prevent frost damage.

Grapevines bear their fruit on one-year-old canes that grew last season. These are easy to identify because they have smooth bark and a light yellowish-brown color. The older wood on your vines is covered with rough, dark brown bark.

There are several methods of pruning grapevines, depending upon the grape variety. The most common method used in home gardens is the "long cane" method, because it can be used on such popular garden varieties as Thompson Seedless, Black Monukka and Concord. The other main method, called "spur" pruning, is used for wine grape varieties and some table grape varieties such as Emperor and Flame Seedless.

Your first step is to select several new fruiting canes (one-year-old canes) to bear next year's crop. The number of fruiting canes you leave on your grapevines should be determined by the age and vigor of your vines. If your vines are young or weak, save only one or two canes; leave three canes on vines of intermediate vigor, and four to six

canes on the most vigorous vines. In order to keep your vine compact, try to select fruiting canes that originate close to the main trunk. Cut the ends off the canes you have selected, leaving 10 to 14 buds on each cane. Near the base of each cane you chose for fruiting, find another good cane. Cut most of it off, leaving only two or three buds. These are called “renewal spurs,” and they will produce fruiting canes that you will be able to use next year.

Your last step is to cut off everything that remains on the grapevine. When you have finished, you should have a grapevine with two to six canes about three feet long, each having 10 to 14 buds. It should also have an equal number of short renewal spurs, each two or three buds long. If you’re using a wire trellis, wrap the fruiting canes around the wires and tie them near the ends.

Repeat the same process each year afterward. Select new fruiting canes and renewal spurs from the canes that grew on the renewal spurs you left this winter. Use the uppermost canes on these spurs for the new fruiting canes, and cut back the lower ones to form renewal spurs.

When using the long cane method of pruning, you should thin fruit clusters in early summer to improve berry size and rate of ripening. Thin the number of clusters to one per shoot when the berries reach the size of a match head.

For a free “Calendar of Backyard Gardening Operations for Grapes” call the U.C. Cooperative Extension office in Mariposa at (209) 966-2417.

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