

# JUST FRUITS

## AND EXOTICS

# MUSCADINE GRAPES

## INTRODUCTION

Most Southerners picked muscadine grapes in the wild as children. Sometimes called Scuppernongs or fox grapes. These spicy-sweet, thick-skinned grapes are an old Southern favorite and are still found growing wild throughout the lower South. They thrive with little care, and the vines can remain productive for 100 years! Modern breeding has brought us a wonderful range of varieties: wine grapes for the home vintner and jelly maker, plus delicious fresh-eating varieties, which can be as large as golf balls! Some muscadine grapes are self pollinating, while the female varieties need a self-pollinating variety to help them set fruit.

## USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Grapes add a touch of old world charm to any landscape. With large, lush leaves and gnarled, shaggybarked trunks, grapes are particularly attractive with clusters of fruit hanging down through the foliage. Use them on fences to divide areas or create hidden gardens within your larger landscape picture. Train them over a patio for a living roof that's cool and shady, but drops its leaves in the winter to let the warm sun in. They can also be trained into small weeping trees for interesting accents in the border or in a large container.

## PLANTING + CULTURE

### SITE SELECTION

Grapes do well on a wide range of soils, but rich sandy loam or clay loam soils are preferred. Grapes do not tolerate flooding and may grow poorly in mucky soils unless planted in raised mounds. Plants will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun. Grapes prefer slightly acid soil (pH 6.0-6.5), but soils of up to moderate alkalinity are tolerated. If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a soil sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test.

### SOIL PREPARATION + PLANTING

The grape should be planted in the middle of the main posts of your trellis. Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either aged mushroom compost, aged manure, or rotted pine bark & aged manure/mushroom compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below). If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation. Space grapes 20 ft. apart.

## FERTILIZATION

The type of fertilizer you choose may be chemical or organic. Make sure that the fertilizer contains iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to age of plant. See chart below:

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Mushroom Compost in Soil	Espoma Tree-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. We recommend the 1<sup>st</sup> fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zone 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Tree-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

**Grapes need more magnesium than many other fruit.** Magnesium deficiency shows as a progressive yellowing between the veins of older leaves and may cause premature fruit fall. To prevent or correct magnesium deficiency, Epsom salts can be applied at the rate of 2-4 ounces for 1-2 year old vines and 4-6 ounces for older vines (recommended application rates from the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service). Spread the Epsom salts over a 6 foot circle around each plant.

## WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new grape. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply – this usually takes 45- 60 minutes. Grapes should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

## PRUNING + CARE

Fruit is produced on new shoots developing from the previous year’s growth. In Year 3, canes produced the previous year should be pruned to approximately 3 in. long in January or February. These canes will produce several shoots that will fruit during the following summer. These new shoots will be cut back to 3 in. the next winter, forming the first fruiting spurs. Depending upon the growth rate of the plants, spurs will need to be thinned in Year 5 or 6 after planting. During the winter pruning, remove every other shoot, aiming for a fruiting spur every 6 in. on each arm. Choose spurs on the top of the vine, if possible. Allow a few extra shoots to grow from the arms to form replacement spurs as the vine ages. Remove tendrils twining around the arms or spurs to prevent girdling.

## POLLINATING

Choose at least one self-pollinating grape to pollinate up to four females. If you want only one grape, choose a self-pollinating variety. Ideally, every third grape in a row should be self-fertile to pollinate adjacent female plants. Females should be no more than 30 feet from a self-fertile pollinator.

## TRELLIS + TRAINING

Find detailed instructions on building a trellis and training the vines on our website: [justfruitsandexotics.com](http://justfruitsandexotics.com)

## VARIETIES

A detailed Variety List can be found on our website: [justfruitsandexotics.com](http://justfruitsandexotics.com)