

Friday's Feature

By

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Prune grape vines for maximum yield

One popular backyard fruit is the muscadine grape. Many people call them scuppernongs. Scuppernong was the first named variety of muscadine; therefore, all scuppernongs are muscadines, but not all muscadines are scuppernongs.

The muscadine grape is native to Florida and has been cultivated in the state for many years. It differs from the bunch grape in that it is harvested as single berries instead of in bunches and the fruit has thicker skin. One reason for its popularity is that the muscadine is seldom seriously affected by disease or insect pests. Bunch grapes are typically not well suited for the Gulf Coast.

Plant breeding and selection has produced some excellent cultivars. The different cultivars vary in their ability to pollinate. There are perfect flowered varieties that will pollinate themselves without cross-pollination. There are female flowered varieties that must be pollinated by another vine that is either perfect flowered or has male flowers. Male flowered varieties that were formerly used as pollinizers for females, but do not bear fruit, and are no longer recommended. For more information on varieties refer to the UF/IFAS publication on muscadines. It's available from your local Extension Office or online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG215>.

The best time to plant muscadine grape vines is around March in North Florida. The plants need to be planted in well-drained soils. Multiple plants should be spaced approximately 15 feet from one another.

Muscadine vines need to grow on trellises for support. Support systems vary so choose one that suits you and your garden.

Muscadines are vigorous vines and develop a lot of vegetative growth over a single growing season. Annual pruning must be severe to keep new fruiting wood coming and to prevent vines from becoming tangled masses of unproductive wood. In Northwest Florida, pruning is usually done from January until mid-March.

Correct pruning of a muscadine is critical. Incorrect pruning will cost you a year's worth of fruit

The basic framework of a vine consists of a trunk, permanent arms called cordons and the fruiting units called spurs. Vines must be pruned each dormant season to maintain this framework.

Pruning is basically the same for all trellis systems. Only the arrangement of the cordons is different. When pruning, it is important to inspect the cordons. If a cordon becomes weak or diseased, remove it as needed and train a shoot to take its place. Always be on the lookout for tendrils that have wrapped around the cordons. Unless they are removed, they may eventually girdle the cordon.

On younger vines, spurs should be spaced about six inches apart on the cordons. The spurs must also be cut back, leaving them about two to four inches long in most cases

Muscadines will drip sap from freshly pruned vines. This is known as "bleeding." It is not harmful when the plants are in a dormant condition.

When pruning is properly done, each vine will appear as a skeleton of its former self. Annual pruning is important and will keep your vines from getting unmanageable over the years. Perhaps more important, it will also assure you of more reliable crops of grapes.

Pruning Muscadine Grapevines

