

## HARVESTING GRAPES

Grapes are one of the trickiest fruits to harvest at just the right time. Most colored grapes make a dramatic color change, called veraison, about a month or more before they are ready to be harvested, indicating the fruit is beginning to ripen. The best way to find out when grapes are ready to pick is to continually taste a small sampling to determine when they are sweet and flavorful. Another less reliable method of determining when fruit is ripe is to keep an eye on the stem of the grape cluster. When the stem turns from green to light tan and begins to wrinkle, the cluster is ready for harvest.

Grapes are one fruit that should be allowed to ripen on the vine. Once harvested, there is no further increase in sugar or flavor. For table grapes, maturity is usually determined by taste testing or by the color of the seeds, which change from green to brown as the grapes mature.

Although the highest quality fruit is obtained by harvesting fully ripened clusters, it sometimes becomes necessary to harvest before the fruit is fully mature to prevent loss. Some varieties tend to crack as they mature and rain increases this tendency. On susceptible varieties, ripe fruit rot spread rapidly during rainy weather. When the growing season is short, a freeze or hard frost may damage the crop. In some locations, birds also do considerable damage to mature fruit. Clusters can be protected by covering with bags or netting to help them mature on the vine.

Always use sharp shears to remove the clusters from the vine. Snapping or cutting with a knife will not only bruise the grapes, but injure the vine as well.

MSU Master Gardener Training Manual, Small Fruits, p. 46

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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