

PRUNING GRAPES

Grapevines start producing when they are 3 years old, at which time they can be trained as mature vines. The most common way of training them is the 4-armed Kniffin system in which the vines are trained to horizontal wires running along the row. Two wires are used for this: one set is placed at 2 1/2 feet above the ground and the other at 5 1/2 feet above the ground. One arm or cane of the plant is allowed to grow to the left and another to the right of each of the two wires, thus creating 4 arms.

Grapes should be pruned from late March through April when the buds begin to swell. The canes selected for each arm should be of moderate vigor, which usually means 12-15 buds per arm. They should be 1/4-1/3 inch in diameter, chocolate brown in color, and preferably branchless. Avoid canes that are less than 1/4 inch in diameter or those that are long and heavy. Train the selected canes along the wires with twist ties or nylon hose.

Finally, leave a renewal spur just beneath each of the 4 arms. This is a short, vigorous piece of wood from last year's growth that will become the cane that will bear fruit next year.

Even on well trained plants, proper pruning often requires removing about 3/4 of the current growth. Most gardeners do not prune severely enough.

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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