

HARDY GRAPES

Deciding which varieties of grapes to grow is of great importance. Decisions will depend on whether the grower is a wine maker or is looking for grape juice, jelly or table grapes. Early ripening is another point of extreme importance in northern areas, as is cold hardiness.

The most widely planted grapes in Minnesota are 'Beta' and 'Concord'. However, a number of far superior cultivars have been developed that will grow well here, and the Minnesota Grape Growers Association no longer recommends either of these. 'Beta' grows reasonably well here but is generally only of value as a jelly grape. It is very high in acid and is not good to eat. Even the juice tends to be very tart and the wine is not desirable. 'Concord' is not reliably hardy in Minnesota and often suffers cold injury. It is also very late and the true 'Concord' will sometimes fail to ripen. Both 'Worden' and 'Bluebell' grapes are hardier, earlier to ripen and better tasting.

The Minnesota Grape Growers Association has put together the following list of recommended cultivars based on the members' most recent experiences.

Table Grapes

'Bluebell' is an old University of Minnesota introduction. Its hardiness, early ripening and disease resistance have led to renewed interest by Minnesota growers. When pressed out it also produces a delicious fresh grape juice. It is winter hardy in southern Minnesota.

'Edelweiss' is an early ripening, large-clustered green table grape with a strong "foxy" flavor. It also makes a nice white wine when picked before becoming too ripe. Although quite disease resistant, 'Edelweiss' is not reliably hardy in Minnesota, but performs well when given winter protection.

'Kay Gray' is an extremely hardy and disease-resistant early ripening white grape that is worthy of trial in northern areas of the state. The clusters are small, but berries are good sized and have a mild flavor.

'Swenson Red' is a delicious, high-quality red table grape with a firm texture, thin skin and a pleasing flavor. Unfortunately it is not reliably hardy in most of the state and should be covered in winter.

'Valiant' is an extremely cold hardy, very early ripening blue grape that might be attempted in northern areas of Minnesota. Its clusters and berries are small, but it is a usable home table grape where other grapes fail. It also produces a delicious red grape juice and excellent jelly.

'Worden' is a very old 'Concord' type that has long been grown in the state. While 'Concord' is

not recommended for Minnesota, 'Worden' ripens earlier and has sufficient hardiness to be grown without protection in the southern half of the state.

Wine Grapes

'Marechal Foch' is a red wine cultivar from France that is the most widely grown grape in Minnesota. Local commercial wineries have repeatedly won awards with Minnesota-grown 'Foch' wines. 'Foch' combines good wine qualities with early ripening and very good disease resistance. It usually requires some winter protection except on the best sites in southern Minnesota.

'Seyval', when properly grown, produces a pleasant, neutral, white wine. However, 'Seyval' requires both winter protection and cluster thinning for success in our area.

'St. Croix' is a locally developed red wine cultivar that is becoming popular because of its winter hardiness and good wine quality.

'St. Pepin' was developed by Elmer Swenson of Osceola, Wisconsin. Although it does require cross pollination, 'St. Pepin' is a promising variety because of its excellent fruity white wine. It is also very good for juice. 'St. Pepin' has borderline hardiness in southern Minnesota.

'Ventura' is a productive, late-ripening, white wine cultivar that has high acidity. It can produce a pleasant labrusca-style white wine and appears to have sufficient hardiness to be worthy of trial in southern Minnesota.

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