

Gardening News

February/March 2021



Pruning Muscadine Grapes

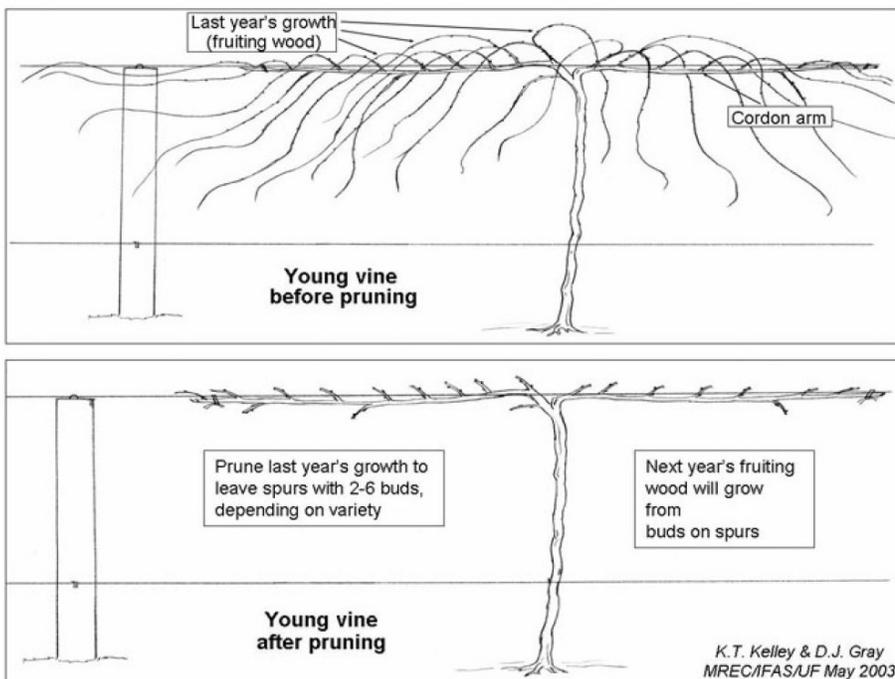
Pruning your muscadine grapes increases the number and quality of grapes you harvest each year. Pruning should occur between January and early March. If you don't prune every year you run the chance of the vines growing out of control. Additionally, after a couple of years, there will be extensive pruning required to bring your vines back into production, as well as the chance for plant disease problems.

Muscadine plant parts include the trunk, cordon and spur. The trunk is the main stem that grows from the ground to your supporting structure. Cordons are the arms that grow down the length of the wires that support the vines. Spurs are the area along the cordons where vines grow to produce your grapes.

Remember grapes are produced on new wood. That means vines that grow in the spring will have the fruit.

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Pruning Muscadine Grapevines



*K.T. Kelley & D.J. Gray
MREC/IFAS/JF May 2003*

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Pruning steps:

1. Pruning should be done between January and early March.
2. Prune off long vines to about 10" from cordon. Make sure your pruners and loppers are very sharp. Grape vine wood is hard, sharp tools can lessen fatigue.
3. Ensure you have 3 to 7 spurs every foot of the cordon, depending on the number of buds you want. Healthy spurs should be 'brighter' in color than wood that is not going to produce fruit. Every so often you will need to remove the spur and let a new one grow.
4. The overall goal is to have 20 to 30 buds per foot of cordon. That is why you have a range of spurs.

Complicated? Ison's Nursery, has several muscadine pruning videos. You can find them here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_9pk3cnPGI&t=49s or search for Ison's on YouTube.

For complete information on selecting, planting, growing, harvesting and fertilizing Muscadine grapes download the Muscadine Production Guide for the Southeast: <https://smallfruits.org/files/2020/07/muscadine-grape-production-guide-southeast.pdf>

Growing Edibles in the Landscape

Article by Dr. Lucy Bradley, Urban Horticulture Professor and Extension Specialist Horticultural Science NC State Extension, NC State University

Edible landscapes connect people with their food by serving up tree fruits, vegetables, berries, nuts, herbs, and edible flowers throughout the seasons. These productive gardens can offer beauty and function in the landscape, unique edible options for the table, and many other benefits.

By planting edible landscapes, gardeners can also

- enjoy more control over their food with a wide array of choices of species and varieties;
- select heritage varieties and thus promote genetic diversity in edibles;
- choose varieties based on flavor, nutrition, and color rather than shelf life, which is a higher priority in commercial production;
- choose what types of fertilizers and pesticides, if any, to use on the food they grow;
- minimize their carbon footprint by reducing the resources required to store, transport, package, and market store-bought produce;
- produce a bounty for the family and share fresh produce with others;
- improve health through exercise and better nutrition; and
- stimulate the senses with diverse colors, flavors, scents, and textures.

Incorporating edibles in the landscape is not an all-or-nothing proposition. It is possible to start small, replacing just a few ornamentals with edibles, or to use edible plants in the entire landscape. Edible plants can perform many of the same functions as ornamental species, if selected carefully. For instance, they can provide beauty and shade, serve as a windbreak or fence, or enhance home security.

For information on specific edible plants and design considerations, view the complete article: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/growing-edibles-in-the-landscape>



Photo source: blog.gwu.edu

February Gardening Chores

Tools: Give your tools a good cleaning and sharpening. Use sandpaper to remove rust, a file to sharpen the edges and oil to coat the metal.

Overgrown Shrubs: Late February is the time to prune over grown shrubs. You can severely cut back Chinese and Japanese hollies 18 to 24 inches above the ground. Thin the remaining branches to make room for the new growth and

remove any dead wood. Be prepared to regularly prune these plants this year. They will have very vigorous sprouts that will need to be tipped often to encourage branching. Another consideration is to prune the shrub into a small tree, if it is in a place you would like a small tree. Remove about 1/3 of the lower limbs and start the process to the shrub becoming a tree.

Ornamental Grasses: Cut back ornamental grasses in February before new growth begins. Do not burn grasses.

Vegetable Gardens: Plant many cool-season vegetables in the garden in late February. For more information on specific vegetables and herb planting dates visit: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>

Fruit Trees: Apply dormant oil to fruit trees to manage scale, mites and other insects. Also, prune fruit trees according to the following NCSU Extension Publication: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/training-and-pruning-fruit-trees-in-north-carolina>

Centipede: Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary to control chickweed and henbit. Centipede is sensitive to certain herbicides (like 2,4-D) choose ones specifically for centipede. Read and follow label directions

Muscadine Grapes: It's time to prune muscadine grapes. For complete information on growing, fertilizing and pruning muscadine grapes visit: <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C949&title=Home%20Garden%20Muscadines> or visit www.isons.com Ison's Nursery is the largest and oldest grower of muscadines in the United States.

March Gardening Chores

Keep Pruning. Continue pruning fruit trees, landscape trees and shrubs. Remove dead or broken branches, crossing branches that rub another branch, and all dead and diseased wood. Also, trim flowering shrubs like Forsythia and Japanese Camellia after they bloom.

Vegetable Garden Planting: Follow the guidelines in the flyer 'Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables. This is an excellent guide, prepared by NC State for planting vegetable seeds and transplants. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs> Plant spring vegetable transplants of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes and onions. Plant seeds for lettuce, carrots, beets, spinach, radishes and peas. Other vegetable and herb information can be found in the calendar referenced above.

Last Frost Date: Even with our unusually warm days and nights, remember our median last frost date is April 2nd. The National Weather Service collects data and presents a summary each year. The 2nd of April is based on data from 1981 to 2010. BUT, you are most likely to be sure you will not get frost from April 16th through October 17th each year. With our changing climate, keep an eye on extended forecasts and don't plant too early in the spring.

Ornamentals: Prune plants that bloom on current season's growth summer. Divide perennials such as hosta's, daylilies, sedums, salvias, mints, thyme and ornamental grasses. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden without purchasing more plants.

Fruits and Vegetables: Fertilize asparagus early in March before the spears begin emerging. Add a layer of compost if you have not already. As your apple, pear and quince trees begin to bloom, spray them with Agri-mycin (streptomycin) to control fire blight.

Know and Grow... Red Maple

Acer rubrum, or Red Maple is a native deciduous tree that may grow to 120 feet tall and 6 feet in diameter, but is more commonly 40 to 70 feet high and 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 feet across. It is a handsome shade tree with a rounded crown and ascending branches to a 30 to 50-foot spread. In nature, it can be found growing in upland deciduous forests, up to at least 1500m in elevation. It is easy to grow in average, medium to wet, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils, including clay, but prefers moist, slightly acid conditions. It is very cold hardy.





This is one of the first trees to show color in the fall. The leaves are opposite, with 3-5 palmate lobes and toothed margins on long red stems. The red maple has a slightly smaller leaf than most other species of maples. Its leaves' most distinctive feature is a rough, saw-like edge. If the leaf margin, or edge, of your maple's leaves appear serrated, it is probably a red maple. The bark of young trees is smooth, silvery-gray becoming scaly and dark with age. Small, red flowers in clusters mature in late-winter and are one of the first trees to flower in early spring. During spring, light brown or red-winged samaras mature. In the fall the leaves turn orange-red fall through the brilliance of this color can vary among individual trees. It is easy to plant and establish as a transplant of a small specimen bare-root, or balled and burlapped.

Do not plant Red Maples next to any kind of pavement. They will slowly decline over time. Plant Red Maples where they have space to spread their roots.

Article source: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/acer-rubrum/>

ABC...XYZ Gardening Vernacular

M is for Micronutrient

Many people confuse plant nutrition with fertilization. Plant nutrition refers to the needs of the plant and how a plant uses the basic chemical elements. Fertilization is the term used when these elements are supplied to the soil as amendments. Adding fertilizer during unfavorable growing conditions will not enhance plant growth and may actually harm or kill plants.

To complete their life cycle, plants need 17 essential nutrients, each in varying amounts. Of these nutrients, three are found in air and water: carbon (C), hydrogen (H), and oxygen (O). Combined, C, H, and O account for about 94% of a plant's weight. The other 6% of a plant's weight includes the remaining 14 nutrients, all of which must come from the soil. Of these, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), the primary macronutrients, are the most needed. Magnesium (Mg), calcium (Ca), and sulfur (S), the secondary macronutrients, are next in the amount needed. The eight other elements—boron, chlorine, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, and zinc—are called micronutrients because they are needed in much smaller amounts than the macronutrients.

Visit the NCSU Extension Gardener Handbook for complete information on all required plant nutrients, as well as symptoms of nutrient deficiencies. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/1-soils-and-plant-nutrients>

Article Source: Crouse, D.A. 2018. Soils and Plant Nutrients, Chapter 1. In: K.A. Moore, and L.K. Bradley (eds). North Carolina Extension Gardener Handbook. NC State Extension, Raleigh, NC. <<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/1-soils-and-plant-nutrients>>

Common Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

Homeowners have a love-hate relationship with dandelions. Children love to pick the bright yellow dandelion flowers because they are close to the ground, pretty and easy to hold. Pollinators love dandelions for their nectar and pollen. For those that enjoy a beautiful green lawn, they are in a constant battle to remove them from the turf area.

Dandelions are a common perennial lawn weed that spreads by wind-blown seeds and new shoots from roots or root segments. When temperatures reach about 50 degrees' dandelion buds start to appear in your lawn.



Seed Dispersal

The dried flower heads that have gone to seed look like puffballs and are made up of 1/8-inch seeds. The ends of each seed have a parachute-type structure on the tip. This allows the wind to carry them for miles, aiding in dispersal.

Cultural Management

Maintaining a dense, healthy, vigorous lawn is the best method of managing many turf weeds. As such, the use of adapted species of grass, adequate fertilization, proper mowing and irrigation practices, and appropriate insect and disease management all help to minimize dandelion occurrence. Low nitrogen fertility may result in high populations due to less competition from desirable turfgrass species. Mowing the turfgrass area as soon as the first dandelion flower-heads appear can help to reduce further infestations. In small areas, dandelion plants can be managed by hand, provided that the taproot, which grows 6" to 18" into the ground, is removed.



Guidelines for Using Postemergence Herbicides

When choosing an herbicide, be sure that it will control the targeted weed and that it is recommended for your turf. Before using, read the entire label and follow it precisely for rate and timing. The following tips will help you achieve optimum control.

- Most broadleaf weeds are best treated in the spring or fall when air temperatures are between 65 and 85° F.
- During hotter temperatures, turf damage is more likely to occur.
- At the time of treatment, soil moisture should be adequate. When stressed by drought, weed control poor and turf damage may occur.
- Do not mow immediately prior to or after application. Mowing lessens the amount of herbicide that contacts weed leaf surface area.
- Treat weeds when no rain is expected for at least 24 hours with spray applications.
- Avoid treating on windy days because herbicide drift can injure ornamental plants.
- Best results occur when weeds are young.
- For acceptable control, repeat applications 10 to 14 days apart may be required.

For complete herbicide control recommendations, visit NCSU Turfiles at the following address:

http://www2.turfiles.ncsu.edu/PDFFiles/004112/Dandelion_Common.pdf

Dandelions as a Pollination Source

Dandelion's peak flowering time is from late March to May, when many bees and other pollinators emerge from hibernation. Each flower in fact consists of up to 100 florets, each one packed with nectar and pollen. This early, easily available source of food is a lifesaver for pollinators in spring.

Bumblebees, solitary bees and honeybees all visit dandelions for food, along with hoverflies, beetles, and some butterflies. Goldfinches and house sparrows eat the seed.

According to the NCSU Extension Plant Toolbox, dandelions have many positive features, such as:

- They provide nectar and pollen to honeybees and other beneficial insects, particularly important in early spring when they are one of the only plants in bloom
- Their leaves, roots, and flowers are all edible. Young flowers taste like honey but they become bitter when they mature. Use flowers in wine, jam, and salads. Leaves can be eaten raw or cooked; the youngest, greenest leaves at the center are best for raw eating. The root is a coffee substitute.
- Their roots can break up compact soils.
- Their seed head is a beautiful puffball and delights young and old when they blow on it to disperse the seed.

Citizen Science: Cornell's Backyard Bird Count

It's almost time for Cornell's annual Backyard Bird Count. Each year in February, tens of thousands of people around the world count the number and type of birds they see in their yard, their neighborhood, and parks. This is called citizen science, where we can help track and identify where birds are in our communities.

If you don't know which bird is which, you can download an app called Merlin Bird Id also from Cornell University. Merlin Bird Id app is an easy way to identify birds. It asks where you are, date you are looking at the birds, where are the birds, such as in trees, flying, at feeders and lastly up to 3 colors of the bird. They will then provide several choices for you to select from. Easy as can be!

Join professional, hobby and persons just interested in documenting birds in their yard on February 12 to 15th, 2021. If you find it fun and interesting, you can bird year-round!



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Pick Bagworms off Your Shrubs Now!



Did you notice cone shaped bags hanging from your conifer shrubs or trees last fall? Now is the time to control bagworms. As they say, the early bird gets the worm! The female will lay 300 to 1,000 eggs in each bag, which means they can produce large numbers of offspring in early summer.

Bagworms are in the bag all winter and emerge in spring. Winter is a good time to pick off bagworms, be sure to clip the silken string that holds them to branches. By removing the bags, you are minimizing future infestations. Drop the bagworm into a bucket of soapy water. This will prevent them from hatching. Later, you can compost the bags.

Late May and early June are a good time to control the bagworm caterpillar. Determine at what level of infestation you want to spray. Sometimes you can tolerate a few bagworms, but if the population gets out of control this is the time to control them. Apply a pyrethroid such as permethrin or bifenthrin as they have a longer residual life than other insecticides. Remember to not spray any blooming plants as you can inadvertently kill pollinators. *Bacillus thuringiensis* or BT is a natural control, as it only kills caterpillars. It may need to be re-applied. Always, read and follow label directions. For complete information on chemical control, refer to the North Carolina Agricultural Chemicals Manual. It is available on-line as a free download.

If you miss spraying in late May- early June, the next best method of control is to remove the bags when they develop. Be sure to carefully cut the silk band that holds the bag on the stem. If you do not it may remain and girdle the branch.

Often native parasitic wasps will control the bagworms. This natural control often keeps the bagworm population at a minimum, which is often tolerable. Your other option is select plant material that is not susceptible to bagworms. The

preferred conifer plants for bagworms are Leyland cypress, arborvitae, cedar, juniper and pine, but they can feed on other species.

For a complete article on bagworms from NC State University Cooperative Extension visit:
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/bagworms>

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Quote

"It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold; when it is summer in the light and winter in the shade." Charles Dickens

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