

Growing Grapes in Bannock County: Select cold hardy early ripening varieties

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Most books and other sources of information are not encouraging towards the potential for grape growing in Pocatello and Bannock County. Yet several varieties of grapes have been grown successfully in this area for many decades. The key is in the selection of cold hardy and early ripening varieties of grapes. Within the last twenty to thirty years the number of good quality grapes bred for colder climates has increased significantly. Many cold hardy varieties of superior quality exist for table grapes, juice grapes and wine grapes.

Nearly all grape varieties commonly seen in grocery stores are too tender to survive winters here or require a longer season than we have or both. Most grape varieties that do well here are from breeding programs in colder areas such as Upstate New York or Minnesota.

European or *Vinifera* Grapes—Not for Bannock

Almost all grapes seen in grocery stores and almost all of the wine grapes used in California, France and Italy belong to a species known as European or *vinifera* grapes. Varieties of this species typically are the least cold hardy and require the longest season of the commonly grown grapes. All are too tender to survive cold winters even in the warmest parts of Pocatello though some may survive a few mild to average winters.

'Thompson Seedless' and 'Flame' are sometimes sold in the Pocatello area. 'Thompson Seedless' is very tender to cold and will survive only the mildest of winters, and even then the season may not be long enough or hot enough for fruit production.

A couple reliable reports show 'Flame' surviving and producing in Pocatello for a few mild years in a row, but survival following a cold winter would be highly doubtful. In general, *vinifera* grapes are to be avoided in this area.

American grapes are cold hardy

Most of the cold hardy grapes that succeed in Bannock County are known as American grapes, though many are actually hybrids with European grapes.

Seedless American Grapes—hardy to -25°F

These are typically the least hardy but the best for fresh eating. Some newer varieties are quite cold hardy.

- **'Canadice'**—Red seedless and hardy to -25°. Sometimes available at local nurseries.
- **'Concord Seedless'**—Blue seedless, hardy to -25°. Often sold locally, best grape for grape pies
- **'Glenora'** —Blue seedless, cold hardy at -15° to -20°. Superior flavor, rarely available except mail-order.
- **'Himrod'**—White seedless, hardy at -15° to -20°. Commonly sold locally, great flavor, very early.
- **'Interlaken'**—White seedless, hardy at -15° to -20°. Commonly sold here, the earliest ripening.
- **'Mars'**—Blue seedless, hardy at -20° to -25°. Likely available only through mail order.
- **'Reliance'**—Red seedless and cold hardy to -25°. Sometimes sold locally, one of the best seedless.

Several other seedless cold-hardy grapes are in development and will soon be available. Some of these have increased cold hardiness and early ripening.

Juice & Jelly Grapes—Hardy to -50°F

- **'Beta' Blue**—Very cold hardy to -50° and early ripening but tart. For the coldest areas only.
- **'Bluebell' Blue**—Hardy to -35° Similar to 'Concord' but hardier, earlier and sweeter.
- **'Catawba' Red**—Hardy to -20°. Sometimes sold locally, ripens late so only for hottest areas.
- **'Concord' Blue**—Hardy to -25°. Common juice grape, does well in Pocatello but may not always ripen in outlying colder or frostier locations.
- **'Fredonia' Blue**—Hardy to -25°. Very similar to 'Concord' but ripens 2 weeks earlier and milder flavor.
- **'Niagara' Green-white**—Hardy to -20°. Variety used for white grape juice, common in Pocatello.
- **'Valiant' Blue**—Cold hardy to -50°. very hardy grape for cold areas, flavor is quite tart.
- **'Worden' Blue**—Hardy to -30°. Similar to 'Concord' but hardier, earlier and with a milder flavor.

Seeded Table Grapes—Hardy to -35°F

These have superior flavor for fresh eating when compared to juice grapes but do contain seeds.

- **'Edelweiss' Green-White**—Hardy to -35°. excellent flavor, ripens early, soft seeds can be eaten.
- **'Price' Blue**—Cold hardy to -20°. Very early, excellent flavor, probably available only by mail order.
- **'Swenson Red'**—Cold hardy to -35°. Early, considered by some to be the best-flavored grape of all.

Many other seeded table grapes will produce well here, likely only available through mail order.

Wine Grapes —Hardy to -40°F

Numerous varieties of wine grapes have been developed for moderately cold climates such as Upstate New York and for very cold climates such as Minnesota. Both states have well-established wine industries.

While California's superior wine varieties are mostly too tender to grow in Bannock County, those wine varieties bred in colder locations will grow well here and can be turned into quite good quality wines.

Wine grapes can also be used for fresh eating and unfermented juice. The majority of these varieties are seldom sold by local nurseries but should be requested.

- **'Aurore' White**—Hardy to -20°. A French hybrid producing a high quality wine; and good for fresh eating.
- **'Cayuga' White**—Hardy to -20°. Top variety in Upstate New York vineyards.
- **'Frontenac' Blue**—Hardy to -35°. Popular new variety in Minnesota producing a high quality wine.
- **'St. Croix' Blue**—Hardy to -40°. Sometimes sold by local nurseries; also good for unfermented juice.

Many other cold hardy wine grapes exist through mail order.

Grape Culture

Provided a cold hardy variety is selected that ripens early enough, grape culture is generally quite easy.

Grapes need full sun and are very tolerant of heat. Generally they grow quite well even in unusually hot areas where there is reflected heat such as south facing walls or areas around pavement. In fact these hot areas are a way to grow and ripen varieties that may not otherwise get enough heat.

Some fruiting may occur on grape vines in partial shade, but if there is too much shade the vine will grow but not fruit until it grows up into sunlight.

Most grapes are not fussy as to soil conditions. A few varieties may get slightly chlorotic on highly alkaline soils; most do not.

Fertilizer applications should be moderate, and in particular nitrogen should be applied modestly.

Irrigation needs for most grape varieties are moderate with some varieties being somewhat drought resistant, yet best yields are achieved with even soil moisture.

There are many methods of grape pruning, training and trellising. Consult a good fruit-growing book to find which method would be most appropriate. In most cases, grape vines in this area are best pruned a little less than is generally recommended.