

Grapes and Wine



What are grapes?

Grapes are berries which grow in bunches or clusters on grapevines. Grape clusters can be green, red, pink, purple or blue; and either with seeds or without.

Interesting facts:

- More grapes are grown than any other fruit in the world. Ninety per cent of grapes are used for wine.
- Commercial grape production is a relatively new industry in Nova Scotia that has developed on the foundation of estate farm wineries. Presently it is a major growth industry in Nova Scotia agriculture.
- Nova Scotia grown grape wines have won recognition at numerous international wine competitions. In 1999 alone, a record 22 medals were won by Nova Scotia wines.
- The most widely planted white variety in Nova Scotia is L'Acadie Blanc.
- Some wineries in Nova Scotia use other fruit, such as strawberries and blueberries, to produce wine.

Where are grapes produced in Nova Scotia?

Grape production is limited to only a few areas in the province that have a longer frost-free growing season, above average heat and milder winters. These conditions are primarily found in the Annapolis Valley, Bridgewater and Malagash areas.

How many grapes do we produce?

Nova Scotia has 52 grape growers and 160 hectares of grapes.

How are grapes produced?

Grape cultivation is called viticulture. "Viti" means "vine" in Latin. Grapes grow on long thin vines, and since they are not self-supporting, growers set up a trellis system. Trellis systems are a series of posts, sometimes with cross-arms, connected by wires. This keeps grapes off the ground and allows workers and machines easy access to fields. Vineyards are rows and rows of grapevines trained on trellis systems.

A grapevine takes 10 years to produce at full capacity, (3.5 to 4.0 kg per vine). Vines are pruned to control growth and increase yield. Grapes bloom in the spring and are harvested in September and October. All table grapes are picked by hand. The fresh grape clusters are individually cut off with pruning shears or harvest shears, and packed into 3 litre baskets, ready for sale. The table grape producers grow different varieties so their ripening period can extend from 4 to 6 weeks.

When the grapes will be used for wine making, they can be picked by hand or machine. Mechanical harvesters straddle the trellis and the grapes are beaten off onto a conveyor belt, which takes them to a hopper. From here the grapes are put in plastic bins and shipped to the winery.

The grapes for ice wines are harvested after the temperature has been -8°C for at least a couple of days.

How are grapes used?

The seedless grapes are mostly used for fresh eating, while the seeded ones are used for wine, juice, jelly, candy and fruit leather. Both types of grapes can be eaten as fresh grapes, and both can also be processed. The vast majority of Nova Scotia grown grapes are made into wine.



What happens after grapes leave the farm?

In Nova Scotia, a lot of the grapes that are grown for wine are processed on the premises. Farm wineries must have at least 4 hectares of grapes adjacent to the winery. Some producers grow grapes on contract for the wineries.

The bins of grapes are transported to the winery, where they are crushed. Grapes for white wine are pressed immediately as skin contact with the alcohol, that results from fermentation, is not desirable. The juice is put into containers to ferment. This fermentation process, which creates alcohol and carbon dioxide, takes 10 to 30 days or more, depending on the type of wine that is produced. The wine is then “racked” (put into tanks or barrels to age) and then bottled and sold.

Red wine grapes are normally crushed then placed in a tank with a wine yeast. The fermentation produces alcohol which dissolves the colour and tannins in the skin giving wine its colour. When sufficient extraction has taken place (about one week) the wine is pressed and the resulting juice is placed in a large tank to finish fermenting.

Nova Scotia table grapes may be sold directly from the farm, or trucked to Halifax and sold fresh.

What challenges do grape producers face?

The short growing season in Nova Scotia is a challenge to grape growers. The Kentville Research Station is working to breed winter hardy varieties that will make good quality wines. One such line is KW94-1, a high yielding, winter hardy white wine grape that looks very promising.

It is expensive to set up a vineyard, and it may take a long time before significant returns are realized. Wine is sold on a world market, so the price and consumer acceptance have to be addressed.

Local consumers need to be aware of Nova Scotia grown fresh grapes, and make them a tasty part of their food choices.

Who's involved in producing grapes?

- Vineyard owners
- Grape producers
- Agricultural supplies companies
- Truckers
- Field workers to prune, spray and harvest
- Winery owners and workers
- Liquor store employees

Contacts and other resources:

Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia