

What's up with the grapes?

In April of 2009, 6 grape vines were planted around the Eagle Heights Garden Arbor. Hopefully, the vines will grow up their stakes and wires and, within a few years, cover the arbor. The vines are a variety from Minnesota called "Red Swenson," and they are supposed to be very tough (especially when it comes to surviving our cold winters). The grapes they produce are also supposed to be very tasty.



How were they planted? How are they being cared for?

Small vines purchased from Jung's Nursery (Fitchburg, WI) were planted in small holes in April 2009. About 250 g (8 oz) of an organic fertilizer (bone and blood meal) was stirred into the soil around the base of each plant. The area around the plants was then covered with 15 cm (6 in) of leaves to help slow weed growth, and the plants were watered heavily. Plants were then watered (with a hose or by rain) weekly for a month.

Over the next few years, the vines will be trained (tied) to metal stakes, then up wires and (hopefully) onto the arbor overhead. The vines may produce flowers in 2010, but will really be too small to support fruit. As a result, we will remove any flowers by hand. The plants will be allowed to produce fruit in 2011 and beyond (if they do). They will be fertilized each year as described above, and about twice as heavily once they are five years old. We will prune them each year after 2009 following standard grape pruning techniques that are a little too complicated to explain here.

Who is taking care of them?

These vines were planted and are being cared for by an informal group of volunteers. The group includes people from around Madison who like fruit of all kinds and want to learn more about it. New people are always welcome! To get involved, e-mail the group at: ehcg.fruit@gmail.com

Why were they planted, and who will get the fruit?

Many people — even gardeners who grow their own vegetables — are unfamiliar with growing fruit and may think that they cannot do so themselves. These plants are being maintained here to show you that ordinary people can indeed grow fruit, and this sign is intended to tell you a little about how it was done. If you want to plant some grapes in your own plot, please go ahead!

Because the Garden Committee felt that these plants would serve an educational purpose, the plants and the supplies used to take care of them are being purchased with money from gardeners' plot fees. As a result, the fruit belongs to all gardeners. We do ask that you:

- a) not harvest any fruit before it's ripe (these grapes are dark red when ripe)
- b) take only a small amount of fruit (a few grapes) so that others may enjoy the same experience
- c) be careful with the plants if you touch them
- d) think about joining the fruit group to help take care of the plants! (see above)