

# Growing and Marketing Seedless Table Grapes at Kimball Fruit Farm

Kimball Fruit Farm straddles the border of N.H. and Mass. We own 200 acres and farm 140 acres. Originally we were an 80 acre apple farm with a small roadside stand. But with the downturn of the apple industry in the 1980's we needed to grow in a different direction. Over the next 10 years my father watched with tears in his eyes as we took 50 acres of apples out and slowly changed to a much diversified farm. We turned the land into other tree fruits, small fruits and a wide variety of vegetables. We also replaced the remaining 30 acres of apples with newer trees and varieties. We also expanded our farm stand to make it easier to market the new crops. There is a lot of competition in our area with farm stands and we needed to find more avenues for selling all the crops we were growing. In 1989 we started going to farmers markets that were just becoming popular in the Boston area. Attending these markets gave us an opportunity to see other farmers' crops and expanded our thinking of what to grow.

I also follow the local university's ideas of crops to grow. I believe it was UMass that had an article on growing seedless grapes. I kept that idea on the backburner of my mind as I hadn't seen any grapes at the farmer's markets we were attending. My wife and I attended a meeting at the Cornell Hudson Valley location, a 2 day event, called "Do you want a farm winery ". After hearing about state and federal oversight we ran back to New Hampshire as fast as we could with the winery idea left behind. After a meeting about grapes, one year, Double A Nurseries from New York gave a talk .They have an extremely useful website with links to trellis construction and variety descriptions. I bought 50 vines each of Vanessa, Marquise, and Mars, based on cold tolerance, disease tolerance, production, and flavor. Next came the trellis which I found the most difficult part as there aren't many vineyards in my area. Thanks to the internet I flew over California with Google Earth and went down to street view where I had seen rows going to the street. It was cool as I could see how they designed there trellis. A few days later my 70 something retired neighbor wanted to help me on the farm as he needed something to do. I flashed the idea of helping with a trellis and he was thrilled. Now he owned a printing company and did a lot of work for Harvard so he was meticulous in whatever he did. Two years later he finished the trellis! Three sets of 2 wires starting at 32" and the top wire at 72". We use VSM (vertical shoot positioning) for our training and pruning. Each trunk cluster putting 4 pencil thin shoots with 10 buds on the bottom wires. We use a taper to attach vines to wires. As the shoots grow from the 10 buds we feed them up through the next two sets of wires. Our fruiting zone is between the bottom and the top wires. Suckers from the base of the trunk cluster are ripped off easily when they are young .Failure to do this makes the vines more difficult to manage as the season goes on, trust me on this! Later in the season starting at the beginning of

August we pull shoots and leaves from the fruiting zone to expose the fruit to sunlight and also for good spray penetration .This is very important as SWD will be around .

Having been an apple grower my whole life made understanding pest control easier. I followed the universities “Small Fruit Management Guide “ in making pest control decisions. Also I have been fortunate to have an SWD traps, in my various fruit crops, with help from George Hamilton’s (UNH) grant project .Black Rot and Mildews are the most prevalent diseases.SWD and Japanese Beatles are the most aggressive insects. Danitol, Mustang Max, and Delegate, in rotation, are what I have found to control SWD, based on trap captures.

We use an instrument to measure sugar to determine harvest time as well as color. This is usually around August 20 and continues to October 15. This wide window of harvesting works well for us in sales. About 90% of our harvest went through our retail outlets and the rest went wholesale through a broker in Boston, restaurants that we are already selling other crops to, and other farm stands. For our retail outlets we package grapes in wooden quart boxes and pack, 20 to a tray, on bread trays. Prices this year were \$5 per quart for retail, and \$3.50 for wholesale. The last 2 years we have picked just over 3000 quarts on the 300 vines. The biggest challenge we have is time. Peaches, apples, corn, tomatoes, raspberries , and all the other crops are in full swing. I have found myself doing all the picking keeping my crew busy on other crops. Being a little over an acre it has been a good choice for our mix of crops and we have great response from customers who now look forward to grape season to come.

[Chills1199@aol.com](mailto:Chills1199@aol.com)

Carl Hills

Kimball Fruit Farm

15 Worcester Rd Hollis, N.H.

184 Hollis St Pepperell, Ma

603-689-5657