

**Workshop Title: Growing Table Grapes in Colder Climates**

**Speaker(s) & their title(s):** Bernadette Goguen  
of Ferme Marcel Goguen Farm

**Executive Summary:**

Bernadette is a retired research assistant who continues to experiment through her farming endeavors at home. Selling fruit and vegetables at her farm in New Brunswick, Bernadette began investigating table grapes for their potential to offer something different and exotic to her customers. Bernadette provides recommendations for establishing an organic table grape vineyard, and varieties that have performed well in her New Brunswick climate.

**Detailed Notes:**

Why did Bernadette think she should, or could grow table grapes in NB?

- Wine grapes are producing well in the Maritimes and some varieties of table grapes are considered to be more hardy.
- She wanted to offer something different and exotic to her customers
- U-pick options could provide additional income
- A local producer to school program would support this market, allowing her to sell her organic grapes to schools.
- Bernadette was told 'it couldn't be done'

There is little difference between wine and table grapes, however table grapes are consumed 'as is' without the need for processing. Certain qualities of a table grape will be preferred by most customers.

Flavour- should be sweet with additional complexity

Colour- should be pleasing with dark purple, and crisp light greens being the most accepted.

Size- large sized fruits, with a nice tight cluster

Texture- juicy and crisp

Seedless varieties - are preferred; seeded varieties will only be accepted if they are exceptional in flavour.

Steps to take if you are interested in growing table grapes:

- Get informed- research internet articles
- Training
- Visit other vineyards
- Ask questions
- Go for it! (Bernadette ordered 500 cuttings in her first year)

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**Site selection:**

- Grapes prefer well-drained soils. If water table is above 60 cm, you will need tile drainage
- Best on a southern facing slope, for cold air drainage
- Wind direction should provide good air circulation to prevent disease
- Bernadette runs her rows in a north south direction for optimal sunlight
- Soil sampling is essential to determine soil pH, and nutrient content
- Add nutrients or lime (to raise pH) prior to planting; Bernadette prefers to top dress her plants with compost after they are planted.
- pH should be at least 5.6, and better over 6.0
- Near large body of water - bud break is late which protects plants from damage in late spring frost

**Recommended varieties:**

Baltica- small tight cluster, matures very early in season (August)

Sommerset – Early maturing (after Baltica) small fruit and cluster, sweet tasting

Reliance- was the most successful for Bernadette, with highest yields, later maturing large clusters with complex flavour.

Petit Joyaux- ‘little jewel’ big cluster, seedless, sweet, small fruits

Roland- Exceptional flavour, with vigorous growth

Eidelweiss- green grape with nice flavour, very vigorous growth, with a thin skin (doesn't keep long)

Tango- Bernadette's favorite green grape, sweet and tart with a tiny seed.

Valiant – similar to Concord

**Year 1**

- Buy from disease free stock
- Bernadette received dormant cuttings in fall, and potted them in late March
- In early spring soak cuttings in water overnight
- Sanitize cuttings by dipping ends in 5% peroxide
- Pot cuttings in organic potting soil
- Place in greenhouse and keep them watered.
- Harden off cuttings 2 weeks before planting
- Prepare field - Tilling is not recommended on light soils
- Plant in spring with 4 ft. between plants.
- Add amendments, if it was not done before hand
- Install drip irrigation
- Stake plants

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- Install trellis system - Bernadette used Hemlock posts placed in 100 ft rows, with a post every 20 ft (5 vines will fit between each post)
- Keep plants weed free one metre around each plant.

**Year 2**

- Continue to irrigate
- Maintain weed free strip around vines
- Prune to select one main shoot
- Train to cordon or arm
- Establish permanent grass in between rows - Bernadette would recommend a short grass variety such as fescue in between rows.
- Remove suckers- some varieties seem to sucker, some suckers are used to replace poor growing plants.

**Year 3 and beyond**

- Check plants each week for insects, disease, and growth rate
- Prune cordon
- Guide new growth between the two wires
- Remove excess fruiting clusters at bloom time - Leave a cluster every 4 inches, allowing half a pound of fruit to mature per plant in first fruiting year.
- Remove lower leaves in August to encourage airflow, and prevent disease
- Protect plants from birds, especially later ripening varieties - Bernadette recommends using a CBC radio because the voices scare the birds
- Eat and Enjoy!

Things Bernadette would try differently...

- Continue irrigation during fruiting year
- Select grass sod for between rows that is shorter growing
- Mulch instead of weeding
- Control wasps

Question:

Can table grapes be grown in a shorter growing season?

Answer:

Baltica Variety matures very early.