

Wyoming residents grow grapes for wines, jellies

By Sandra Frost

Bucking horses, coal mines, gas wells, and high, cold desert are images that come to mind first when asked about Wyoming. Grapes and wine are not near the top of the list.

Grapes are successfully grown in Wyoming, though, at both the homeowner and commercial scales. Grape varieties may be suitable for juice, jams, and jellies, table grapes, or wine production. Grape variety research was done at the University of Wyoming Sheridan Research and Extension Center (SREC) over several years (www.uwyo.edu/uwexpstn/Sheridan.asp). Colorado State University has also conducted grape variety trials under conditions similar to Wyoming and makes variety recommendations (www.coopext.colostate.edu/TRA/PLANTS/fruit.shtml).



Photo courtesy of South Dakota State University

Frontenac, a red wine grape, which is very vigorous and hardy, can be grown in Wyoming.

Site and variety selection are the most important factors for growing grapes in Wyoming. A site on the sunny south side of a house that provides protection on the north and west sides from snow and wind is ideal. Winter hardiness is an important variety characteristic since grape vines may live many years.

Taking soil samples and having them tested for grape production is a good idea. Soil testing information sheets can be obtained at any University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service county

office in the state or online at http://ces.uwyo.edu/Forms/CES_Subject_Forms.htm. There is a \$20 fee for the standard fertility test at the UW Soil Testing Laboratory (http://ces.uwyo.edu/Soil_Main.asp), which includes pH, salts, organic matter, phosphate-phosphorus, nitrate-nitrogen, lime, and texture. Specify that the site will be used for grape production on the questionnaire mailed to the lab with the sample. There is a fee for additional tests. The lab is on the UW campus in Laramie and can be reached at (307) 745-4825 or soiltest@uwyo.edu.

Grape growers and winemakers have formed the Wyoming Grape and Wine Association (www.WyoGrape.com) to promote interest and success in the industry. Growers in Wyoming harvested nearly 45 tons of grapes in 2009. The association has a list of preferred wine grape varieties that do well in Wyoming. Association members also share information on resources, getting started in the industry, and sources of nursery stock.

Winter hardy varieties recommended by the association include:

Grapes for wine:

- Frontenac (red)
- Marquette (red)
- Marechal Foch (red)
- LaCrosse (white)
- Elvira (white)
- Frontenac Gris (white)
- LaCrescent (white)

Grapes for dessert and jams and jellies that have grown well at SREC include:

- Beta (blue-black)
- Valiant (red)
- Concord (blue-black)
- Kay Gray (white)
- Worden (blue-black)
- Bluebell



Sandra Frost is a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service educator based in Powell serving northwest Wyoming. She can be contacted at (307) 754-8836 or at sfrost1@uwyo.edu.