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Plant a Grape Arbor and Eat/Preserve Your Bounty

By Michael Pizza

UCCE Master Gardener & Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

Grapes truly are an incredible fruit. Not only are they easy to grow, they can also provide a very low cost and refreshing shade structure in a short amount of time. Grapes have been popular in El Dorado County since the California Gold Rush. These grapes not only supplied spirits to the gold rushers, they also supplied food and nourishment to our local settlers. Our appreciation of fine wines has fostered a great resurgence of grape growing in El Dorado County since the 1950's, but many local home gardeners continue to underappreciate and underestimate the grape.

Our soil and climate here in the foothills provide an incredible growing environment for grapes. Of course, there is the quick and immense crop of fruit for food or juice or wine. Perhaps equally wonderful for the home gardener, however, is that the grapevines can easily and quickly provide a beautiful architectural shade structure in the garden.

The Master Gardeners and the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County will join forces on Wednesday, September 7 to provide a free public class on grapes. The goal of this class is to assist local gardeners and food enthusiasts to appreciate the glories of the garden grape in our home gardens and kitchens.

Master Gardener Dave Hale, who is also a local grape grower, will begin the presentation by teaching about how to plan for grapes in your home garden. He will cover the needs of the vine and the varieties you might want to consider. He will share important factors to consider when choosing and planting the young vines. Site selection is vital; he will discuss the vine orientation, the spacing and the watering. He will briefly teach how you can propagate your very own vines for planting this fall or spring. Dave will also explain to the home gardener how one can train the vines and adapt them to home gardening needs. Lastly, he will be discussing the important aspects of cultivation, weeding, harvesting and pruning.

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The second part of the presentation will be hosted by Master Food Preservers Phil Gray and Mike Pizza. They will share with our local gardeners and food enthusiasts how to utilize those glorious grape harvests. They will begin by discussing how to best maintain the quality of the grapes after harvest. Freezing grapes is the quickest and easiest way to preserve grapes for enjoyment throughout the year. They make a great snack and can also be used frozen for cooking and for jams and jellies and juices. Phil and Mike will demonstrate the easiest ways to prepare your grapes for a delicious jelly. Phil will share his “award winning” Cabernet Grape Jelly recipe.

Join the UCCE Master Gardeners and the Master Food Preservers on Wednesday, September 7, at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park, for this FUN and FREE public class. The class will take place from 9 a.m. until noon.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu and a Master Food Preserver will return your call or email. The Master Food Preservers are also available to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our ENewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!