

Chapter 7 - Vetting Varieties for Your Subtropical Micro-Climate

I had prior experience vetting and growing grapes on my farm in Mendocino and as a teenager in Texas. Prior to and after receiving my first plants from the Grape Repository at University of California Davis in 2018, I read everything I could find on growing grapes both in books and on the internet and I encourage you to gather information also. Although these sources can be very helpful, our main teacher will be the grape itself as you will be watching it and observing how it grows. I also encourage you to keep notes in your Log Book from the very beginning. Looking back on this information over the years is invaluable and gives one perspective and helps with decision making. (Appendix: See my log books in the Reports section on our website)

In Chapter Eight, we will discuss varieties that have grown well here, can be reproduced from scion, can withstand and thrive with the Chinese Beetle, and have a great taste. We will also share the variety names that for one reason or another did not grow well. In my opinion, taste is the most important quality followed by tough and hardy. You don't want to be growing varieties that would force you to think about spraying or have a poor-quality flavor profile. If you are a home grower, finding even one variety of grape that loves to grow where you are will give you fruit for the rest of your life and beyond. Remember grape plants can live hundreds of years.

As far as I can tell, there are no European wine grape varieties that have been bred specifically for subtropical environments. These wine varieties grow mostly in temperate zones. There are hybrid bunch grape varieties that combine the genetics of the European grape with American grapes that can be used for juice, raisins, or eating out of hand, or even making wine or vinegar. Some of these varieties have subtropical parent genetics giving them an introduction to the subtropics.

Finding those varieties has been the focus of this research project. Possessing some subtropical genes is extremely important as it gives the grape the best chance to survive in our unique climates.

Finding the right varieties to vet will be challenging but not impossible. Here are a few ideas for obtaining bunch grape varieties that have subtropical parent genes in their lines.

1. Team up with your local Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers Association or your local Extension Agent from University of Hawaii Manoa and together you place an order for specific varieties for research from the University of California Davis Grape Repository. These requests can be made anytime, but scion wood is only sent out once a year usually in March. Extension could theoretically grow out varieties at your local CTAHR station and become a scion repository for local growers. The Fruit Growers Association could also set up an experimental grape vineyard that eventually could supply scion wood for your Island. You can use our list in Chapter Eight of our most promising varieties to get you started.
2. There could be at least one nursery on your Island that brings in bare root grape varieties usually in January/February. You may need to research this to find the right ones and ask

them to bring them in. However, these varieties will most likely be suited for temperate climates. If you live high on the mountain in Kula, Maui, Volcano or Waimea, Hawaii Island, all more temperate areas, these varieties could possibly work.

3. There is a good chance that there are grape varieties being grown on your island by grape enthusiasts! When we reached out to grower groups across the state to identify our stakeholder group two years ago, we found many people who were growing one or more varieties in their back yard. Do some investigating, ask around and see if you can find grape vines growing in your area. In the Winter when grapes are pruned, there would be the possibility of obtaining woody scions to plant out and vet in your garden or on your farm. Because they have already been growing successfully in your area, that is a jump ahead for you!
4. We will have a limited amount of scion wood available starting in 2023, and will be reaching out to our stakeholder group to identify serious growers who might want to do the basic vetting for your growing area.
5. University of California Davis also keeps some tropical and subtropical varieties from other areas of the world that could also possibly work. This would take further investigation. In 2022 we are beginning to vet some varieties from India, but this will take another 3 years at the minimum to know if they will work.

You must be creative and determined in order to establish a new fruit for Hawaii's table. Grapes are a beautiful, nutritious and important fruit that complements the banquet table of fruits that can be grown here.