



Growing Hybrid Grape Vines

By David Sayer

The wine-grape was brought to Britain over 2,000 years ago by the Romans; the vine still thrives in the southern half of the country, with around 360 commercial vineyards producing in 2006, almost 3.5 million bottles of red, white and rose wine.

With global warming, and the increasing availability of disease resistant Hybrid vine varieties, this is a good time for adventurous gardeners to plant vines for juice, eating, or for making wine.

The new vine grower can reap the reward of three decades of cultural experience gained by growers, and more importantly, the development in vine research stations, of a number of disease resistant grape varieties. These vines, known as *Hybrids*, have been bred by crossing the European wine grape, *Vitis Vinifera* with native N. American vines such as

Vitis Labrusca V. Riparia V. Rupestris.

The European vine gives quality to this genetic marriage, with the native vines contributing disease resistance, hardiness, and high yields.

Hybrid vines are ideal for organic growing, as they have good disease resistance, and do not need regular spraying with fungicide. My experience is that some are disease-free, while others have good resistance to powdery mildew, (the most serious vine malady) but may get a touch of botrytis toward the autumn in a wet year.

I started growing vines in my garden over 35 years ago, near Beccles in north Suffolk, when there was little reliable information available about vine culture in the UK; I planted the varieties being grown in English vineyard such as; Muller Thurgau, Madeleine Angervine, Reichensteiner, and, more recently, Bacchus. These did sometimes make an acceptable wine, however, in most years, the growing season was one long battle against fungal disease then when wine making, removing the affected grapes from bunches. Winemaking should be enjoyable, but this was not my idea of fun. Commercial growers have access to a great armory of chemical fungicides, which they need to use every 14 days throughout the growing season. These are not available to the amateur vine grower.

Two Hybrids which I have grown for several years are, the white **Phoenix** and the red **Triomphe d'Alsace**. Triomphe is grown in commercial UK vineyards, it has red juice, producing good coloured reds, a good one to try is, Wyken Red, from Wyken vineyard, near Bury St. Edmunds.

Phoenix is good for eating, if grown on a sunny wall, however, I find the sugar level too low to make a good wine.

I recently acquired more land to extend my garden, in which to grow flowers and vegetables, and more vines. I have chosen hybrid varieties with qualities which, when blended together, should compliment others, to make a balanced, harmonious wine. The varieties are, **Regent**, **New York Muscat**, and, **Kempsey Black**. an outstanding variety, with a good rich flavour, for eating and wine. It can make an excellent pink wine, or blended with Regent, to make a lighter style of red. Kempsey Black, was introduced by: **Sunnybank Vine Nursery**, and is only available from them by mail order, as rooted cuttings.

The possible combinations are endless; it's up to you to blend for your own taste, and see what works for you; you can of course, vary this every season.