

Growing Kiwifruit

Kiwifruit Actinidia which was once listed as 'Chinese Gooseberry' are native to the mountains and hills of southwestern China. They are a very successful fruiting plant to grow on the Mainland and Victoria Island not only for the delicious fruits but also for the ornamental nature of the vine. The rampant, twining climber will reach 10m (30ft) or more if left unchecked. The leaves are large and heart-shaped and the cream coloured flowers are 1^{1/2}" across. The Kiwi vine is most successfully grown in areas where Grapes grow well. In fact there are very few differences between Grapes and Kiwis as far as planting, pruning and care goes.

GROWING CONDITIONS

Kiwifruit prefer a site in full sun or partial shade with a minimum of six hours of sun. The vine prefers rich, well-drained loam, but will tolerate heavy soil. Good drainage is very important - avoid soggy low areas. Water adequately, but not excessively and feed often. The shoot tips are susceptible to frost in the spring and prolonged sunshine is necessary to ensure proper ripening. Choose an area that is protected from high winds and is not frost prone. Set plants approximately 5-6m (15-18ft) apart in a row.

FERTILIZING

Kiwi vines are heavy feeders but the roots are very sensitive to fertilizer burn, so over fertilization should be avoided. They benefit from a top dressing of compost as well as well-rotted manure in late winter and spring. Do not fertilize past mid-June. The plant requires high potassium and also magnesium to prevent potassium induced deficiency. GARDENWORKS Fruit and Berry Food, supplemented with Fritted Trace Elements (F.T.E) is a great choice for a fertilizer.

TRAINING

One of the main pitfalls in growing kiwifruit is failure to support them. Supply sturdy supports to twine upon such as a trellis, arbor, pergola, wall or fence. They should be at least six feet tall. Guide and tie vines to the support as necessary. Occasionally thin vine to shape or control pattern.

IRRIGATION

Shallow roots and a vigorous growth habit requires regular irrigation. Water stress can delay the development of vine maturity and appears to reduce hardiness. Lack of water will induce leaf drop and early fruit ripening which leads to poor flavour. Too little water will also reduce fruit size, flower numbers and induce early fruit drop.

POLLINATION

Kiwifruit is dioecious which means that male and female flowers are found on different plants. Male plants do not produce fruit but they can pollinate up to eight female vines. See diagram for a detailed illustration of both female and male flowers. Tag them to ensure that you always know which is which. If you have both female and male plants in bloom in your garden then hand pollination is probably not necessary. However if you don't have a male flower in bloom hand pollination is very easy. You will have to pick a handful of just-opened local male blossoms including the stem. Fold back the petals of the male flower and hold it by the stem end. Make face to face contact with a freshly opened female blossom. Rub the male flower around in a circular motion several times until all of the female pistils have made contact with the male stamens. On average, depending on the species, each male flower can pol-





Female
flower

DORMANT PRUNING (FEMALE KIWIFRUIT)

Yield and fruit set is optimized by light pruning and fruit thinning, rather than heavy pruning and no thinning.

Pruning is very important, if not done branches flower and fruit so heavily they hang down where animals can reach them. Unpruned vines may also have a reduced fruit yield because they strangle themselves.

Kiwis are pruned similar to grapes. They fruit off one-year-old wood on the first six base buds. This year's new wood becomes next year's fruiting branches.

Pruning should be done quite early in the winter while it is still very cold out, and well before growth starts in the spring to prevent vine bleeding.

1. Remove any broken or twisted canes.
2. Remove one third of the wood that is growing from the permanent arms. Cut the wood that has fruited two seasons and the majority of wood that fruited the previous year.
3. Keep any vigorous one-year-old canes that have



Male
flower

PRUNING (MALE KIWIFRUIT)

Male plants are pruned immediately after flowering. Cut back to vigorous new growth closer to the leader. Because male plants do not fruit they can be particularly vigorous and are not pruned during the dormant season so that maximum flowering is achieved.

SUMMER PRUNING

Remove all basal suckers, cut out all tangled and unwanted shoots that are only a few inches long. Don't allow weak spindly branches to grow unnecessarily long, it will only weaken the vine.

HARVESTING

Kiwi vines can bear fruit for 40-50 years. If the location is suitable you can expect at least 20lb of fruit from a mature plant, but you will have to wait about seven years before you get a worthwhile crop. The fruit quickly sizes after pollination reaching full size in mid-summer. The remainder of the season is needed to mature and ripen the fruit. Fruit tastes better when picked at the very first signs of softening; then refrigerated and ripened as opposed to fully ripening on the vine. Fruit should only give a little with finger pressure. Harvest usually takes place late September to early October. Make sure all fruit is picked before the first frost arrives. Snap off the kiwi fruit, leaving the stem on the vine. Even minor damage causes ethylene production, which prematurely softens other fruit. Kiwi fruit can be stored for five to six weeks after picking. Removal from the refrigerator (or cool storage area) initiates softening and ripening.