



Grapes!

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The one grape vine we have in the garden is a legacy from a little garden that used to be down near our neighbors on the ground level. The various trunks sprawl up and across the steep bottom corner of the garden, supported by a melange of wires and half-assed devices.

I really must make a good vine support system one of these years. But for this year, the old wreck does just fine, and the grapes seem perfectly happy again.

Here in Italy, they call this kind of grape Nana Francaise, which means dwarf French. They are in fact a Concord style grape. Although they do have seeds, and my wife won't eat the skins, I really enjoy the sweet skunky flavor.

Most years we have so many grapes that we can't eat them all, and I get to give bagfuls away to the neighbors. I also get to earn points by putting select bunches into bags for my mother-in-law.

For the past few years I've been making raisins, using the oven on low heat for several treatments a day for about a week. The resulting raisins still have the seeds in them so they are surprisingly crunchy, but they go just fine into a granola mix.

Two years ago we had an extra large harvest that was probably around six hundred bunches! Most of the bunches are smaller than the huge perfect bunches one sees in the markets, but still, six hundred bunches is a whole lot of grapes.

This year I estimate only about three or four hundred bunches, but the average size of the individual grapes is really large.

One funny detail is the fact that I can only harvest grapes in full daylight, because the ripe grapes and not quite ripe grapes look the same in the shade. Only when the grapes are dark purple are they the sweetest and most flavorful.

I have some friends up the hill who grow about fifty vines and they make wine from their grapes. They have a handful of different varieties, but the dwarf French are the most numerous.

Lots of people here in town buy bulk grapes from up north and make their own wine in cellars here and all the hardware stores and farm supply stores sell a full range of winemaking equipment and supplies. Most of these homemade wines are pretty good, but are probably best consumed within a year of making.

I've already got a bottle corking machine I inherited from my father-in-law. I'll have to see about building some sort of cellar and then I'll think about planting a few more grapes and starting to make wine myself.

In the meanwhile, I'll content myself with gorging on fresh grapes for a month every year and making a kilo or two of raisins that will last over the winter.

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