

They're Growing Cold Hardy Grapes

Andy and India Farmer have been growing grapes in their Vermont valley since 2002, propagating and selling their starter vines across much of the country. Their Northeastern Vine Supply breeding program includes as many as 50 different cultivars. Some of the older cultivars originated in France, while others have yet to be named. Their sell list includes as many as 25 cultivars that have a history of being cold-hardy, have been tested, and have been named.

"Everything we sell is a cross, which brings together several different species of grapes with cold hardiness and shorter ripening times," says Farmer. "Our customers don't have to wait until October to harvest. Some of our varieties ripen as early as August, but the bulk of them are in September."

When Farmer first started breeding and selling cold-hardy grapes, he called Elmer Swenson, the patriarch of cold-hardy grapes. He considers himself fortunate to have had that opportunity, as Swenson died a few years later.

"Elmer's breeding program has been the backbone of the cold-hardy industry," says Farmer. "The University of Minnesota, noted cold-hardy grape breeder Tom Plocher and others built their programs on Swenson's genetics."

Farmer sells red wine vines, white wine vines, and table and juice vines. All three groups include Swenson selections, as well

as Plocher and the University of Minnesota selections. He notes they're as variable and versatile as his customer base.

"We work mostly with growers in cool and cold climates from Maine to Montana and south to Colorado and back across to Pennsylvania," says Farmer. "However, we also do business in milder states like Virginia and New Mexico, where there are microclimates that see the value of these varieties and what they might bring to a blend."

Meeting customer demand involves planting about 250,000 cuttings each year across seven to eight acres. These cuttings are taken from the 10-acre mother block, which also includes vines harvested for Farmer Wine, their emerging wine business. They also maintain hoop greenhouses dedicated to table and seedless grapes.

"We have our fingers in everything except juice," says Farmer. "However, we could use both our wine and our table grapes for juice if we wanted."

He suggests Brianna, a white grape that was selected by Swenson, as an example of versatility.

"It's early ripening, makes an outstanding seeded table grape, and makes great wine," says Farmer. "It has a unique and delicious pineapple flavor in the fresh grapes that translates well to the wine."

He notes that it's the kind of grape that vineyards are seeking.

"It can be used to make a blended dry

wine, semi-sweet or dessert style, or even as a sparkling wine," says Farmer. "Blending in wine making is an opportunity to try different things. Blending allows every wine to be unique, even with the same varieties in your vineyard."

Currently, there's an oversupply of all kinds of fruit for juice or wine. As a result, prices have fallen. That doesn't rule out success with locally made products, especially if they have a unique flavor, says Farmer.

"There's a lot of interest and intrigue today in finding new experiences," he says. "People are looking for a change. It also fits with a motivation to support local business and agriculture."

Farmer sells individual vines starting at \$14, with prices dropping to \$4.75 at 50, \$4.50 at 500, and \$4.25 at 5,000. Regardless of the order size, he says he's committed to sharing what he's learned with every customer. Hoop house table grapes and Farmer Wine have been part of that learning experience. Both enterprises are providing him with knowledge and experiences he can share. He emphasizes that the sharing is a two-way street.

"I'm learning every year and have the incredible chance to work with growers all around the country," he says. "It's in my best interest to help new or existing growers do as well as they can with their next planting."



Seedless table grapes growing in a greenhouse as proof of concept.



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Mullein Used In Home Remedies

A misunderstood weed might be free medicine for your family. Mullein, a hairy, herbaceous biennial, grows over 8 ft. tall. You'll recognize it by its small yellow flowers along the tubular central stalk and the large, fuzzy leaves at the base. These are plants in their second year, since the stalk and flowers won't appear before then.

Mullein is native to Europe, North Africa and Asia, and it's widespread across Australia and North America. The scientific community knows it as *Verbascum thapsus*, but it's more commonly called velvet plant, candlewick, shepherd's staff and beggar's stalk.

For centuries, mullein's been a popular herbal remedy for tonsillitis, bronchitis, emphysema and tuberculosis, as well as stomach and intestinal infections. The leaves contain mucilage, a gel-like substance that soothes inflamed mucous membranes. Dry the leaves to make a tea that helps suppress colds and coughs. Some mullein fans even find it helpful for slipped discs and bone problems.

Compounds in mullein have cough-relieving and mucus-thinning properties. One of its compounds, ursolic acid, shows evidence of preventing and treating COVID-19. It's typically consumed as an infusion or syrup, often combined with mint, rosemary, hawthorn flower or pine leaves. Apply it directly to the skin to treat burns and wounds.

Mullein's purpose can also be less medicinal. Dried, the leaves serve as an excellent fire starter, and history shows that ancient Romans used the flowers as a yellow hair dye. Only a few flowers bloom on each stalk daily, so leave the plant undisturbed while harvesting some.

Contrary to popular belief, mullein is quite common. You can find it almost anywhere with disturbed soil, especially if it's chalky, sandy or has a lot of gravel. This often includes pastures, fields and roadsides. Plants growing near roads are likely contaminated with chemicals and are not suitable for any medicinal purpose.

To grow your own, plant mullein seeds in



Mullein is a widely used herbal remedy for tonsillitis, bronchitis, emphysema, tuberculosis, and stomach and intestinal infections.

full sun after the last risk of frost. It's intolerant of shade and will be quickly outgrown by other plants in that area. Cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil, pressing them firmly into the ground. The young plants need at least an inch of water each week. Expect them to flower in the second year, then die soon after.

The plants aren't considered aggressive because they only spread in disturbed soil. Still, they're known for taking over roadsides and construction sites due to their short lifespan. After that, the seeds go dormant in the ground, waiting for the next soil disturbance to germinate, sometimes decades later. Research from Michigan State University shows germination is possible after a hundred years. So, if you find a clump you can use, scatter the seeds in scuffed-up soil. That guarantees you'll have plenty to harvest for years to come.



Robot's arm extends about 19 1/2 ft. and moves the wand 180 degrees. The spray tip rotates 360 degrees to reach every corner.

Robot Washes Pig Barns

Manually pressure washing barns is a routine practice on pig farms throughout North America. This process exposes workers to large amounts of organic dust and debris, increasing their risk of lung disease.

Envirologic, a Swedish company, made the task simpler and safer by developing its unique EVO Cleaner, a robotic washer designed specifically for barn cleaning.

New Standard Ag of Manitoba came across the robot while searching for better cleaning options for its Canadian customers. They successfully tested it and brought it to North America.

"Farmers can design their own recipes of how they want the EVO Cleaner to work," says New Standard Ag Capital Equipment Sales Representative Kolby Woods. "It can be programmed to spot or bulk wash and clean according to a barn's interior and washing needs using a joystick to set the customization."

The unit uses 3.95 to 4.76 gpm of water between 2,610 and 3,200 psi. Magnets are placed along the stalls for guidance, and connected routines are created once and stored locally and in the cloud. They're easily

adapted for different pen sizes and shapes.

The robot's arm extends about 19 1/2 ft. and moves the wand 180 degrees. The spray tip rotates 360 degrees to reach every corner. Routes are programmed to wash forward through a barn and then reverse to cover the opposite sides and walls.

The 26 1/2-in. wide EVO Cleaner can be customized to a slightly smaller wheelbase for narrower alleys. It moves autonomously and can turn 90 degrees. Its rechargeable battery operates for 30 to 40 hrs.

Text or email real-time notifications are sent when a problem is encountered or a room is completed.

The EVO Cleaner's cost, including training, setup and support, is approximately \$75,000 CAD (\$55,525 USD).

"New Standard Ag stocks parts for our North American customers, plus service teams help farmers along the way," Woods says.

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