Flower World

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KIWI GROWING AND PRUNING GUIDE

Kiwis are fun, rewarding, and relatively easy to grow, and they typically don't require spraying. They are vigorous, attractive vines that produce nutritious and delicious fruit. To thrive, kiwi plants need a strong trellis or arbor, regular watering, fertilizer, and annual pruning. While most varieties require both a male and female plant for pollination, the 'Magic Kiwi' is self-fertile because it has male and female vines grafted onto the same plant.

Varieties

Arctic (Actinidia kolomitka)
A small, hardy fruit known for its smooth, edible skin and sweet, tangy flavor. Unlike the fuzzy kiwifruit, it can be eaten whole without peeling. Well adapted to cold climates this variety can survive freezing temperatures that would damage other kiwi varieties. Often called "kiwi berries," Arctic kiwis are packed with vitamins, particularly vitamin C, and are popular in home gardens and specialty markets.

Fuzzy (Actinidia deliciosa)
The fuzzy kiwi is a small brown fruit covered in a soft, hairy skin and is best known for its bright green flesh inside. It has a sweet yet slightly tangy flavor, with tiny black edible seeds. This type of kiwi, often called green kiwifruit, is commonly found in grocery stores and is usually peeled before eating. Fuzzy kiwis are rich in vitamin C, fiber, and antioxidants, making them a healthy snack choice.

Hardy (Actinidia arguta)
Hardy kiwis have smooth, thin skin that can be eaten whole. Hardy kiwis are smaller and sweeter than fuzzy kiwis. In addition, hardy kiwi plants tolerate colder climates much better than fuzzy kiwi plants.

Silver Vine (Actinidia polygama)
Silver kiwi is a lesser-known type of kiwi with smooth skin that may have a slightly silvery sheen. It tends to be smaller than the common fuzzy kiwi and can often be eaten without peeling. The flavor is usually sweet with mild tanginess, like other kiwi varieties, but more delicate and is often used for medicinal purposes. Silver kiwi plants are valued for their hardiness and ability to grow in a range of climates.

Site Selection

Kiwis should be given a sunny location with wind protection. South facing slopes are ideal. Kiwis thrive in heavy or light, well-draining soils.

Soil Preparation & Planting

Fertile soil, high in organic matter is ideal. To add organic matter and improve fertility, a green manure crop and addition of compost and manure are important techniques. When ready to plant, dig a hole large enough to accommodate the roots without crowding. Slow acting materials like bone meal, seaweed meal, and rotted manure can be mixed with the native soil. Potted plants should be planted carefully so as not to disturb the roots. Rootbound potted plants, however, should have their roots pulled apart and spread to the sides of the hole. For all plants, do not let the roots dry out. Kiwis should be planted near the same level as they were grown in the nursery. After planting, soak the planting area to remove the air from around the roots.

Fertilizing & Care

Kiwis are shallow rooted and need water during the summer. Mulching a 2-3" circle around the plants with straw, compost, or other organic materials conserves moisture and keeps weeds down. After the first year, young plants can use about a 1/2 pound of nitrogen annually. After 4-5 years, increase the nitrogen to 1-1 1/2 pounds annually. Spread the fertilizer, either organic or artificial, throughout the area of the planting area to feed the Kiwi root system. Apply fertilizer before summer to avoid frost tender wood the next winter.

Support

There are many ways to support your Kiwi vines. While they can be growing on a fence or trained to the side of a building, an arbor or trellis is preferred for best fruit production. Supports should be husky and well built. We recommend building your arbor or other support before planting.

Pruning & Training

When planting, if your Kiwi is not tall enough to reach the top of the support, we recommend that you cut the plant back to about 1 foot. from the ground. This forces a vigorous shoot to grow rapidly to the top of the support. Gently tie this shoot to a stout post as it grows and later remove other less vigorous shoots. When the vine reaches the top of the support, tip it back, and allow two buds near the top to grow and train them along the support wires and beams. Tie them loosely with heavy string or plastic tape. These cordons form the basic structure of your plant.

By the end of the second season, you should have a good framework established. Before spring, cut back the cordons to 8-10 buds. These buds should produce your first fruiting spurs. Train the end bud to extend the cordon further along the trellis and prune it back the following spring to 8-10 buds to produce more fruiting spurs. Once the cordons have reached the limits of the support, regular pruning can begin.

Kiwis bear flowers and fruit on wood that has grown from the previous season's growth. Dormant pruning of female vines begins by removing wood that has already fruited. Usually new fruiting spurs will have developed from buds at the base of the older fruiting canes. Most of the old wood is removed back near the main lateral (cordon), and only the new fruiting wood is left. Twisted, tangled and broken canes should be removed as well as those crossing from one side of the plant to the other. Growth hanging to the ground or growing straight up should be pruned. Excess fruiting spurs should be removed so that 8-12" separates each cane. Once you have pruned you Kiwis, you will begin to get a feel for what should stay and what should be removed.

Male plants should be cared for differently. Grown only for the flowers, male kiwis only need about one fourth of the trellis space in a small planting. Males can be pruned more severely to control growth and avoid crowding the female vine. Heavier summer pruning is widely practiced with male plants.
CAUTION: Avoid pruning in early spring after the plant has begun growth, excess bleeding can occur and damage to the plant may result.

Winter Care of the Fuzzy Kiwi

The biggest problem with growing Fuzzy Kiwis in Washington has been frost damage to the lower trunk. While the top of the plant is hardy to 10 degrees below zero, sunny weather with very cold nights can cause freeze damage to the lower portion of the trunk. In many cases, this damage is severe enough to girdle the plant, causing the death of the top. While plants will often send up new shoots, the top growth is lost. A great way to prevent this damage is wrapping the trunk with cardboard or foam insulation. This will insulate the trunk from extreme temperature fluctuations.