

Kiwi Growing & Pruning Guide

Kiwi are fun, rewarding, and easy to grow, not requiring any spraying. They are beautiful vines with nutritious delicious fruit. Kiwi do need a strong trellis or arbor and some pruning annually. Fertilizer and water are the remaining ingredients needed to begin enjoying this exciting fruit.

Varieties

In our experience, there is not a significant difference between the growth habits of the Fuzzy Kiwi (*Actinidia deliciosa*) and the Hardy Kiwi (*Actinidia arguta*). The new extra hardy Kiwi (*Actinidia kolomitka*) is different from the other varieties in its less vigorous growth. It should require less space and less substantial trellising.

Site Selection

Kiwis like sun but no wind in all but the hottest areas of the country. Kiwis should be given a sunny location with wind protection. South facing slopes are ideal. Kiwis thrive in heavy or light soils so long as they are well drained.

Soil Preparation & Planting

Fertile soil, high in organic matter is ideal for you Kiwis. 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 soil from the planting hole. Potted plants should be planted carefully so as not to disturb the roots. Root bound potted plants, however, should have their roots pulled apart to some extent and spread to the sides of the hole. For all plants, **DO NOT LET THE ROOTS DRY OUT**. Kiwis should be planted at about 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 helps conserve moisture and keep down weeds. 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 so as to feed the Kiwi rooting 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 and ease of harvest. Supports should be husky and well built. We recommend building your arbor or other support before or as soon as possible after 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 will force 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 bear 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 to near the main lateral (cordon), and only 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 out or tied. Excess fruiting spurs should be removed so that 8-12" separates each can. Once you have pruned your Kiwis, you will begin to get a feel for what should stay and what should be removed.

Male plants are treated somewhat differently. Since they are grown only for the flowers, they need only 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 we have seen in growing the Fuzzy Kiwi in Western Oregon and 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. We have had success preventing this damage by wrapping the trunk with cardboard or foam insulation. The idea is to keep the trunk from extreme temperature fluctuations.