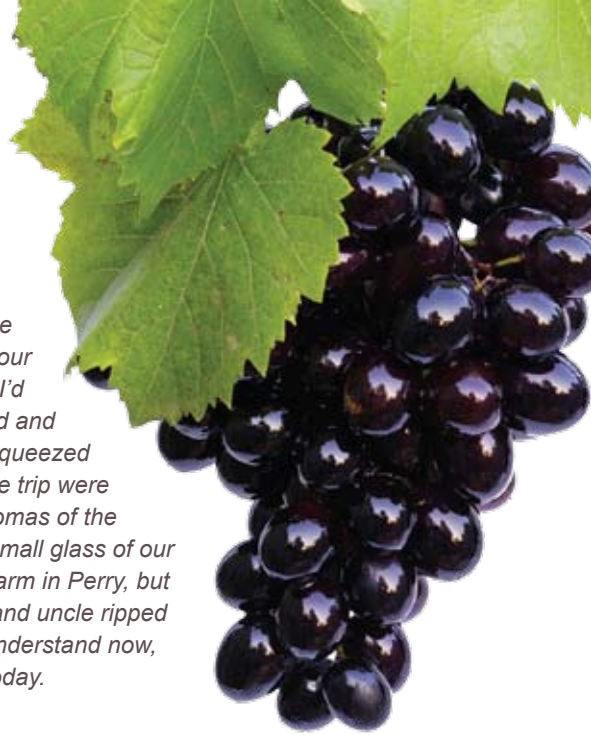


# One for the Grape

by Skip Dugan, HORTICULTURE AND MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS MANAGER



*Look at this picture taken in 1955. That's me, three years old, with my two older sisters. Behind us is our twenty acres of Concord grapes. At harvest time, I'd hop into an ancient International truck with my dad and we'd drive to Geneva with loads of grapes to be squeezed at the Welch's plant. The indelible memories of the trip were the noise and clatter of the squeezing line, the aromas of the freshly processed juice and the best treat was a small glass of our wonderful product. Life was good for me on that farm in Perry, but after one too many early spring frosts, my father and uncle ripped out the grapes and planted nursery stock. I can understand now, why that happened and why it is still happening today.*

SEASONS  
CONCORD  
VINEYARDS

LAKE ERIE DELIVERS TWO CLIMATOLOGICAL FACTORS as gifts to the grape growers in Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula counties. It acts as a giant heat sink, keeping the region cooler longer in the spring, which delays the onset of leaf buds and protects vines from late frosts. The hilliness of the area helps by bleeding off the cold air, sending it flowing to the low lying Grand River valley. The second gift comes when the lake sends warm breezes through the area, extending the growing season through the fall. This allows each grape to produce higher sugar content and correspondingly, tastier and more valuable juices. Unfortunately, my family's vineyard land was pancake flat with little air movement. For our grapes to survive potential frosts, we needed to invest in windmills or aircraft engines to move the air, which was too expensive for us at the time.

Concords were the favorite grape planted for decades (see map) and they still represent 65% of all grapes grown in the area. They yield approximately \$1,000 of juice per acre. However, Chardonnay and other vinifera (wine-producing) grapes offer \$6,000 per acre for juice and if bottled can yield \$30,000 an acre. So why do growers bother raising Concords? The cost of the transition to viniferous is prohibitive, coupled with the fact there is no income for

five years while the new grapes mature. Most Concord growers are elderly and resistant to change and their children are less willing to join a family business that is not considered as profitable, putting these vineyards AT RISK.

One problem facing these growers is that their farms do not qualify for traditional farmland preservation grants. There has also been a lack of local funding for the required match to retain state or federal money. This changed with a program created by the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District (LCSWCD), Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Ohio Wine Producers Association. The cooperative program called One For The Grape emerged in summer 2007. This program supplies funds to grape growers who wish to establish an agricultural easement on their property, in effect getting paid to forgive their development rights and keep the property forever green. The program provides funds for cost-sharing for field tilling and planting new vineyards with the more profitable viniferous varieties.

A sister program called Adopt-a-Vine offers top wine varieties to backyard grape growers and wine aficionados as a means of promoting sustainability of existing vineyards. This spring they're offering bare-root grafted vinifera vines for sale in conjunction with the LCSWCD annual spring tree seedling program. Vines can be purchased and planted at one of four vineyards, or your own back yard. Other participation levels support the planting of 50 viniferous vines at your favorite grower, provide a plaque showing your row, two bottles of wine and an opportunity to help with harvesting. For more information contact Maurine Orndorff at 440-350-2730 or visit [lakecountyohio.gov/soil](http://lakecountyohio.gov/soil).

