



..... THIS MONTH
WE'RE HARVESTING
Grapes!



Farmer Spotlight

**THOMAS BENZLER - BENZLER FARMING
FRESNO/SANGER, CA**

Benzler Farms has been in the organic grape production business since 1953. Today, Thomas Benzler continues that legacy by managing 250 acres of table grapes, raisins, and citrus just outside Fresno city limits. "My grandmother was into a natural lifestyle, and we farmed that way too. When the county started taking applications for certified organic production, my grandmother and father were first in line," Benzler explained.



For Benzler, growing grapes is a year-round job. After the leaves drop in early January, Benzler and his crew vigorously prune the vines. "Everything we remove from the vines is mulched and incorporated back into the soil to improve soil health," Benzler said. In the spring, buds appear, shoots emerge and grow, and flowers begin to bloom. As the flowers die, tiny green berries appear. These will eventually grow and ripen into mature clusters of grapes.

While the grapes grow, Benzler's crew puts in countless hours to ensure consumers enjoy a high-quality product. They remove leaves around each cluster to improve airflow and reduce cosmetic imperfections, trim the bunch to eight inches in order to increase berry size, and strip a small ring of bark from the trunks—called girdling—to force nutrients from the vines and roots into the fruit. "All these practices help us produce a desirable product—a product moms and dads will put in their grocery cart," Benzler explained.

When grape berries achieve the correct size, sugar content, and color, clusters are harvested by hand. Harvest usually begins mid-July and continues until the end of October. At harvest, the clusters are trimmed and inspected, packed into cartons, stacked on pallets, and transported to a cold storage facility to quickly cool the grapes. "We pack everything in the field. Grapes are packed today, cooled tonight, and are on their way to the store tomorrow," said Benzler. "Everything's sold under the Benzler label, so we do our very best to keep customers happy." You can find Benzler's organic grapes in independently owned co-op grocery stores across the U.S. and Canada.

FOOD for FUEL

GRAPES PROVIDE UNIQUE
health benefits



They are full of essential vitamins and a natural source of beneficial antioxidants.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE HEALTH BENEFITS
OF INCLUDING GRAPES IN YOUR DIET:

Healthy HEART

Polyphenols in grapes may help promote the relaxation of blood vessels to support healthy blood flow and pressure.

Strong BRAIN

Grapes are a natural source of flavonols, a compound associated with decreased risk of developing Alzheimer dementia.

Healthy SKIN

The vitamin C and antioxidants found in grapes can help revitalize your skin and make it less sensitive to sun damage.



GRAPE CROSTINI



Photo credit: healthyfamilyproject.com

The word *crostini* means “little crusts” in Italian, which alludes to the essential role of toasted bread in this recipe. The bread toppings may include a variety of cheeses, meats, vegetables, or fruit. Often served as an appetizer, *crostini* are the perfect size for an afterschool snack. This recipe takes a traditional toasted bread base and adds kid-friendly toppings that are easy to prepare and delicious to eat.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole wheat baguette
- ¼ cup cream cheese
- 1 cup grapes
- ¼ cup basil leaves (optional)

Tools: Serrated knife, cutting board, paring knife, toaster

(Adapted from healthyfamilyproject.com)

Directions:

1. Wash your produce under running water.
2. Using the serrated knife and cutting board, carefully slice the baguette into ½-inch thick rounds.
3. Toast the bread.
4. While the bread is toasting, use the paring knife to slice each grape in half. Chop the basil.
5. Assemble the crostini. Spread cream cheese on each piece of toasted bread. Top with several grapes and a pinch of basil.
6. Repeat the steps above until all the ingredients have been used.
7. Enjoy!

★ CLASSROOM Connection ★

Grape Dates Mix Up

California—they have only been cultivated here for the past two centuries. In this activity, students will hone their chronological thinking skills as they consider important events in the history of grape cultivation in California.

Materials: Markers, string cut into 4-foot lengths (one for each group), a clothespin for each student, scissors, tape, student worksheet (page 3), internet access (optional)

Procedure:

1. Read the mini book, *Table Grapes: So Many Delicious Choices!* After discussing the book, review important dates in the development of new varieties.
2. Explain to students that California farmers have been producing table grapes for the past 200 years. During that time, there have been many historical events in grape production.
3. Distribute the related worksheet to the class. Read the important dates listed on the worksheet together, pausing frequently to ask, “What else was happening during that time in history?”
4. Assign each student a historical event listed on the worksheet. Using the template provided, invite students to summarize and illustrate their historical event. Students will also include at least one other event that occurred during that time.
5. Place students in groups, being mindful not to group students with the same historical event. Explain that the grape dates are all mixed up. For each group, distribute tape, string, and enough clothespins for each group member. Show students how they can use their supplies to build a timeline and organize the events chronologically.
6. Invite students to move around the room observing the timelines. Work cooperatively to make adjustments as necessary.
7. Ask students the following reflection questions: Which event caused the most growth in the grape industry? Which event was the most harmful to the grape industry? Which event had the biggest impact on grape growers?

Objective:

Students will summarize and organize key events from California’s agricultural history.

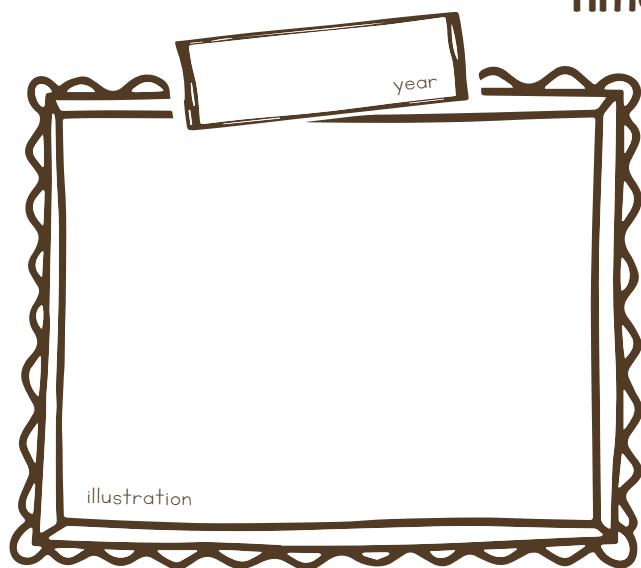
California Standards:
HSS Analysis Skills K-5: CST 1;
HSS Analysis Skills 6-8: CST 1,
CST 2; HSS 4.2.6

Grape Dates Mix Up

These grape dates are all mixed up! Complete the timeline card for one of the grape dates listed below. Work with a group to put your timeline cards in chronological order.

A	In California, the fresh grape boom hit in 1839 when a former trapper from Kentucky, William Wolfskill, planted the state's first table grape vineyard in the Mexican colonial pueblo now known as Los Angeles.
B	Viticulture was originally brought to California by Spanish Franciscan friars, who in 1769 began cultivating grapes at California missions in order to produce sacramental wines.
C	By 1850, as the gold rush brought more and more miners to California, would-be miners began investing in table grape vineyards instead of ore to make their living selling fresh fruit.
D	Some of the largest and most destructive wildfires in California history developed in the summer of 2020, many in close proximity to vineyards. Many grapes exposed to smoky conditions developed "smoke taint" and could not be sold.
E	R.B. Blowers, of Woodland, California, sent the first 22-pound box of California grapes to Chicago via the new transcontinental railroad in 1869.
F	On September 8, 1965, Filipino-American farm workers began a strike against Delano-area grape growers, protesting poor pay and working conditions. Five years later, most of the major grape growers in the area signed their first union contracts, granting workers better pay, benefits, and protections.

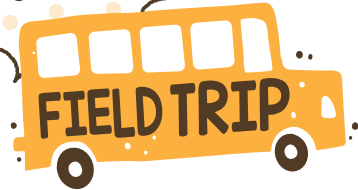
Timeline Card



Summary of event: _____

Other important events during that time:

virtual



Cotton Candy grapes might sound like something from Willy Wonka's imagination, but there's nothing fictional about these sweet fruits!

This video, produced by California Bountiful, takes you on a trip to a California vineyard to learn about several unusual—and delicious—grape varieties.



SCAN ME

DIG DEEPER

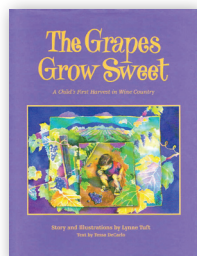
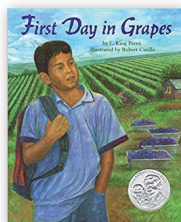
These books, websites, and other resources will help you and your students learn more about grapes.

BOOKS

First Day in Grapes

by L. King Pérez and
illustrated by Robert Casilla

Chico and his family move up and down the state of California following the harvest seasons. Each September, during grape harvest, Chico enrolls at a new school and faces new challenges. The year Chico begins third grade, however, proves to be different.



The Grapes Grow Sweet: A Child's First Family Grape Harvest

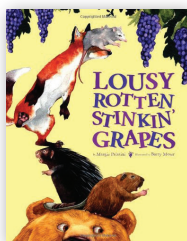
by Lynne Tuft

For the first time, four-year-old Julian is old enough to take part in the grape harvest on his family's vineyard. Through Julian's eyes, this book offers a captivating glimpse of growing up on a family vineyard.

Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes

written by Margie Palatini and
illustrated by Barry Moser

Fox is undoubtedly sly, clever, and crafty, but can he come up with a plan to reach the grapes? In this humorous spin on a well-known fable, Fox tries to enlist the help of all the forest animals in his quest for a tasty treat.



WEBSITES

grapesfromcalifornia.com

The California Table Grape Commission website provides additional information about how grapes are produced in the Golden State. The site highlights grape facts, health information, and recipes. Consumers will enjoy featured videos about grapes.

learnaboutag.org

The California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom provides free resources to teachers. The resources highlight many of California's 400 agricultural commodities, including grapes.

RESOURCES

Resource: Farm to You – Table Grapes (Grades 3-5)

By California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Explore the journey of table grapes from the farm to you. This resource illustrates the farm to you process while including two unique lesson plans related to grape production.

Lesson Plans: Grapes in the Classroom (Grades 1-5)

By The California Table Grape Commission

This set of five lessons incorporates grapes into Math, English Language Arts, and Visual Arts. These simple lessons provide a basic introduction to grapes for young students.

Resources: Grapes for Schools (Grades K-8)

By HMC Farms

HMC Farms offers educational resources that teach kids all about grapes. Parents and teachers can download activities such as mazes and word searches, as well as classroom lesson plans and educational videos.

