

Hardy kiwi (*Actinidia arguta*)

Exposure: Full sun to part shade. Zones 5-7.

Soil: Grows in well-drained soil. Prone to root rot, so avoid heavy soils.

Growth habits: A vigorous, climbing vine, hardy kiwis are low maintenance plants with beautiful foliage that is disease and insect resistant. Most female kiwi varieties require a male pollinator for fruit production. While the plants are quite hardy, it is best to plant them in a location protected from wind and late frost if possible. Kiwis produce large crops (up to 100 pounds per plant) of grape sized, smooth skinned green to red fruit similar in flavor to fuzzy kiwis. Plants flower in late May.

Landscape uses: Hardy kiwis are beautiful vines suitable for many landscape uses. Place hardy kiwis on well constructed arbors, fences or high trellises capable of holding the heavy fruit yields. Well suited for home or commercial vineyards in our bioregion.

We don't recommend letting kiwis climb a tree because their weight could damage the tree, not provide enough sun to fruit well, and put any fruit out of reach.

Edible/Medicinal properties: Hardy kiwi fruit is an absolutely delicious, nutrient dense fruit that is loaded with vitamin C and is high in other vitamins and minerals, especially folate and potassium. Hardy kiwi fruit is high in anti-oxidant effectiveness, pectin, and fiber. It is great for fresh eating, mixing with other seasonal fresh fruits, fruit pies, as well as being suitable for drying.

Pollination: Most female kiwis require a male to fruit, and are quite fussy about which male. We carry two "families" of hardy kiwis:

- The Geneva, Anna, and Issai females can be pollinated by the Meader or Hardy male. Issai will produce some fruit without a male, but will produce more fruit with a male.
- The Cordifolia female is pollinated by the 74-32 male.

Caring for your hardy kiwis

Training: Commercially, kiwis are trained with one or more trunks growing up to a T-bar wire trellis. Permanent branches are trained along the wires, with fruiting wood growing from the permanent branches. When using an arbor or fence as a trellis, keep the trunks and permanent branches straight because wrapping them around a post or wire will weaken the stem.

Pruning: Dormant pruning should be done in the late winter, well before growth starts, to avoid bleeding. Remove most of the wood that fruited the previous year, along with any twisted or damaged wood. If vigorous one-year-old wood didn't develop or the plant lacks vigor, retain some of the fruiting arms that fruited the previous year by cutting back to eight buds past the last fruit-bearing leaf axil. Keep some short laterals that have terminated their growth - prune these back close to the leaders for fruiting. Only prune females during the dormant season - wait until summer to prune the males to get maximum flower production.

Alternatively you can prune both males and females in the late spring, just before flowering. Remove shoots that do not have flowers that originate outside of the area where you want vines. Cut flowering shoots back to four to six leaves past the last flower and remove any tangled shoots. Later in the summer remove shoots not needed for replacement and tip the replacement canes to prevent tangling.

Watering: The kiwis will likely need to be watered deeply once a week if there isn't enough rain. Lack of water will reduce fruit size and production. Drought will cause leaf drop, uneven ripening, and poor fruit flavor. Water stress also delays vine maturity and may reduce vine fall hardiness.



Fertilization: Hardy kiwis should be fertilized twice a year - in early spring when the plants are dormant and again after blooming (early June). The first year apply 1 lb of 10-10-10 in the spring and 0.75 lb in summer. In the second and subsequent years apply 2 lb in the spring and 1 lb in the summer. The roots are very sensitive to fertilizer burn, so avoid overfertilization and spread the fertilizer over the whole root system.

Frequently asked questions about hardy kiwi

How close together do they need to be planted?

Plant them 4-30 feet apart - with enough space that one doesn't overwhelm the other, yet close enough for insect pollination. The male can be pruned smaller since it doesn't produce fruit.

My kiwi isn't fruiting yet. What's wrong?

Kiwis take 3-5 years to start flowering and another couple years after that to start fruiting, so it might not be old enough to fruit yet.

If your plants flower but don't fruit, ensure that you have both a female and male, that they are both flowering, that you aren't pruning the fruiting wood off the female plant, and that they have enough sun, water, and phosphate.

My plant looks weak and collapses during hot weather. The leaves are small and yellow. What's wrong?

Hardy kiwis are susceptible to phytophthora crown and root rot, which are soil fungi that cause weak plant growth and small yellow leaves. This is much worse on heavy wet clay soils or with excess irrigation.

Cats really like my kiwi plants and are digging at their roots and clawing their trunks. Is this a problem?

Yes, that's really not good for the kiwis. Scratching the roots and bark can make the plant more susceptible to harmful fungi and disease. Try putting a wire cage around the base of the plant with some rock mulch on top of the soil.

Additional information

See the Useful Plants Nursery website at www.usefulplants.org for videos demonstrating planting and other plant care techniques.