

# How to grow hops at home



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Ask a Master Gardener

**Q**uestion: Can you give me some tips for growing hops in the Umpqua Valley?

**A**nswer: Growing your own hops is rewarding and exciting. Hop (*Humulus lupulus* L.) is a hardy, climbing herbaceous perennial that is used principally as a bittering and flavoring agent in beer.

You can grow hops using either rhizomes or crowns. Rhizomes are a piece of root from a female plant while a crown is an entire plant.

Hop plants are dioecious, meaning male and female flowers are produced on separate plants. Female plants produce cones (flowers). The female plants are the type you will want to purchase. You can acquire hop plants from local nurseries, online sources or by propagating from established plants.

To get started, plant your hops in well-drained soil and full sun exposure for optimum growth. Hops also need room to sprawl out. Prior to planting, work an all-purpose fertilizer 6-8 inches deep into the soil. Later, side-dress your plants with well-composted manure throughout the season. Cover your plantings with straw or mulch to prevent weed growth.

Hops need a support system to grow upwards, such as a pole or a sturdy trellis. Hops can quickly cover a 20 foot vertical trellis. Hop stems are called bines (not vines) because they grow around a support structure in a helix and cling to the surface using stiff, hooked hairs. Hops require a lot of water, and a drip irrigation system is an ideal choice because



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Female hop plants produce cones. You know it's time to harvest hops when the cones start to feel papery and dry.

watering at the roots can help to reduce disease.

Established plants need around 1.5 inches of water each week. Each winter, the foliage dies back, but the roots are alive and will sprout new growth each year.

Hop cultivars developed for brewing are divided into two basic groups; bittering hops and aroma hops. Bittering hops have relatively high levels of specific acids that produce bitterness in beer. Aroma hops generally have a lower content of bittering acids and a more balanced essential oil profile that imparts pleasant aroma and flavor properties to beer. Here are some popular cultivars:

■ Cascade is an

aroma-type cultivar and easy to grow. Cascade is known for having a unique floral, spicy and citrus character with balanced bittering potential.

■ Nugget can be used as a bittering hop. It has pleasant, mild, herbal aromas, minty bittering and good green hop aromas. Nugget tastes great in a Session IPA and Red IPAs.

■ Willamette once was the most widely grown aroma variety in the US. It is named after Oregon's Willamette River which runs through the heart of the state's hop-growing region.

■ Centennial can be used for bittering and aroma purposes. It is often referred to as a super-Cascade due to

its very high oil content used for brewing.

Hop cultivars developed for ornamental purposes usually have a desirable foliage characteristic, such as an unusual color. Ornamental hops with bright yellow foliage include Comet and Bianca. Blue Northern Brewer is a cultivar with beautiful dark blue-green foliage.

Growing hops requires patience. It takes around three years for plants to reach full production. The first year, you'll only get about ten percent of a harvest. By the third year, the output will be at 100%.

Hop harvest takes place between the middle of August and the middle of September. You know

it's time to harvest hops when the cones start to feel papery and dry. If you touch them, they will leave a yellow powder on your fingers. When you squeeze the cones, they release a fragrance and spring back to their original shape.

You'll also see the lower bracts of the cone turn brown. This happens about 13-16 weeks after planting.

Hops can be grown in containers, but it's going to take more effort. To plant hops in containers, select a high-quality potting mix with extra compost to improve the drainage. The pot needs to be at least 20 inches in diameter to provide enough space for the roots to grow and spread.

They make a lovely addition on a trellis in your backyard patio.

Growing your own hops for brewing or ornamental purposes can be quite satisfying – the plants are large and attractive, work well for providing a natural look for arbors and archways, and the cones produce pleasing flavors and aromas for beer brewing. Consistently producing healthy hop plants with good cone yields is a bit of an art, but with experience, it is a process that can be mastered easily.

*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu).*