



How to Grow Hops in Your Own Backyard

When you receive your rhizomes, store them in the refrigerator. They need ventilation, so ensure that if they are in a plastic bag it is left opened to allow for airflow.

Choose your site carefully, with an eye to what kind of space full-grown plants will need and how you plan to support the mature bines. Well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5 is ideal. If you have acidic soil, you can raise the pH with lime or wood ash.

Plant your rhizomes laying flat (horizontally), about 1" deep in "hills" with soil mounded up to aid in water drainage. Each hill should be at least 3 feet apart, and different varieties should be at least 5 feet apart.

Water frequently, but do not overwater. Hops need a lot of water in a growing season, but like to be moist and not soaked. Too much sitting water can cause rot and foster conditions that promote fungal diseases of hops like downy mildew. The biggest nutrient requirement for hops is nitrogen, most of which is needed during the vegetative stage. A high nitrogen fertilizer can be applied around the beginning of June, and again about a month later. Do not apply nitrogen once hops start to flower. Mulching will help keep weeds at bay and conserve soil moisture.

You can trellis your hops in any way that works for you, keeping in mind that mature bines will grow 20+ feet tall in a growing season and the majority of hop cones form toward the top of the plant. Our commercial hop trellis system is 18 feet tall. You can use the side of a barn or building, a porch, an arbor, a clothesline pole, or whatever you have available. In the first year, plants will not grow to full height and may be trained up something temporary and shorter, like a 6-8 foot stake.

Once shoots emerge and get to be about a foot long, select the best 3 or so to train up the trellis. Use a sturdy string (commercially, we use coir twine) that is anchored in the soil near the plant and reaches up to the top of your trellis. Train the bines to wrap around your string in a clockwise direction. Once you train the young shoots, they will continue to grow up the string themselves, aided by little "hairs" that help them grab onto the string as they follow the sun each day. Prune back the rest of the growth throughout the season. Hops love sun and heat, and in optimal conditions at the peak of the growing season, can grow as much as a foot a day. We love to mark the string with a Sharpie first thing in the morning and see how far a plant will grow on a hot July day!

In the first year, your hop plants will likely not produce any or perhaps just a few cones, depending on the variety. By the second year, you can expect to have some cones to harvest, with full production beginning in the third year. Different varieties are ready to harvest at different times in the season, but optimal cones will be fragrant and feel light and "papery" when squeezed, as opposed to hard or "green". After the first year, it is easiest to cut down the bines and lay them across a picking surface to harvest cones. Leave a foot or more of bine at the crown when you cut, which allows for sugars to go back into the crown as the plant continues to die back.