

Factsheet

The Great Vine at Hampton Court Palace

- More than 230 years old and over 36.5 metres long, the Great Vine at Hampton Court Palace is the oldest and largest known vine in the world. It was believed to have been planted by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown around 1768, during his time as Surveyor to George III's Gardens and Waters.
- The oldest plant in the garden is the Great Vine. It started as a small cutting from the Black Hamburg vine at Valentine's Park in Essex (which no longer survives).
- The Great Vine was first planted in a glasshouse built to house Queen Mary's collection of exotics from the tropics. Its roots were planted outside and its branches trained inside the glasshouse, which measured 18 metres by 4 metres. By the 1790s the Vine was thriving so much that the glasshouse had to be lengthened by a further 3.5 metres.
- The current aluminium Vine House was built in 1969, and incorporated the wrought-iron Victorian supports. The re-building was unique as it was the first time a glasshouse was built around a plant. Both the frame that supports the Vine and the viewing gallery (still used by the general public) come from an earlier 19th-century wooden vine house.
- In 1800 the girth of the trunk was 330 millimetres. In 1887 it was already 4 foot around the base; it is now 12 foot around the base and the longest rod is 120'.
- The Vine was first shown to the public in the 1840s when Queen Victoria opened the gardens to the public.
- The Vine usually blossoms in early May with small and fragrant flowers.
- The crop is usually harvested in September and it takes the Vine Keeper around three weeks to remove all the grapes. It produces a crop of between 500 and 700 bunches of grapes (between 220-320 kilograms). The largest recorded crop of grapes from the Vine were 1,800 bunches in 1798 and 2,245 bunches in 1807.
- The grapes, which are black and sweet, have always been used by the Royal household as dessert grapes, grown specifically for the table. In 1930,

however, George V started sending the grapes to hospitals and, within five years, they were being sold to visitors to the Palace. Today the full crop of black eating grapes is sold to visitors in the Palace shops in late summer or early autumn.

- In 1933 the grapes were 6 shillings per pound. A shilling of this went towards the baskets in which they were sold and these were specially made by soldiers blinded in the First World War.