

SEA GRAPE: Leaf Reduction

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In the early spring, set the sea grape in full sun. Water it well and give it a full strength application of liquid fertilizer such as MiracleGro™. Instead of totally removing the leaves, cut each leaf down to a thin sliver.

Continue to water normally until new leaves break out everywhere. At this point slow down on the water. Give it only enough to survive, allowing it to somewhat dry out between waterings. Keep the plant in the full sun and do not fertilize during this time.

When new leaves have begun to form (and only then), remove the "slivers" leaving the petiole (stem of each old leaf). Never cut the "slivers" from a branch that has not sprouted.

As the new leaves bud out they will be a striking reddish bronze and slowly change to green. If one or two leaves get too big, cut them off.

When all the new leaves have turned green, go back to normal watering and fertilizing. Once you do, this additional water and fertilizer will cause numerous new leaves to emerge. Once again you will have to go through the reduction process. Continue to remove any oversized leaves as soon as they appear too large.

Remember to rotate the tree so all sides will leaf out equally. In the late summer and winter, let the sea grape grow naturally. The following year use the same "sliver" process. The leaves will be reduced even more.

Other growers claim that keeping the sea grape root bound and frequent defoliation keeps the leaves small. Experiment with your tree-in your climate-and find out what works for you.