

VINE TALK

Harvest.

Vineyards in the Summit area started off the 2008 harvest bringing the vine to wine in late August. After a year of fire and ice, a blast of heat came through the state just as the kids went back to school. We baked in temperatures sometimes exceeding 100 degrees F for nearly 2 weeks. Even the nights were hot and the fog and cooling ocean breezes scarce. Sugars shot up and some fruit was rushed to harvest while others surged ahead in what might otherwise have been a late year. Another example of how you never can tell.

2008 has been a year of temperature extremes that has affected set, berry development and harvest. Many vineyards are reporting smaller than usual cluster size, small berry size and lighter yields. Such news often plays well to the winemakers ears because small clusters and small berries, as long as they don't shrivel up, provide the essence of quality for the best of our Santa Cruz Mountain wines. For growers it is a year to enjoy the wine and console ourselves in the knowledge that the wine starts in the vineyard.

For vineyards with fruit still hanging, monitor vine water status closely. Pinot Noir with its delicate skin is especially sensitive to temperature swings. Severe heat events can lead to shrivel. Deep roots or water-ing ahead of the heat can be an effective defense strategy. Other varieties seem to hold up better. Older, deep rooted healthy Syrah vines may benefit from some stress and a little shrivel can show well.

Crop estimating is a challenging job each year. This year many growers may overestimate their crop because they may not account for the reduced cluster size and misses on frost damaged vines. Be sure to put cluster weight into the equation when estimating crop.

Post harvest is a crucial time for action in the vineyard. Once the vines are harvested immediately apply deep irrigation if possible to the vines. A deep drink all through the night will go a long way to putting the vines to bed content. Consider some post season nutrient supplements especially if your vines exhibited deficiencies during the year. In our area in the fall nutrients are best applied through the drip unless an early rain comes to wash in dry material.

It is time as well to consider what to do with the vineyard floor once the grapes are in. Cover crops are useful for holding the soil in place as well as providing organic matter to the profile. They also enhance diversity and contribute beauty to the landscape.

Crimson clover is a versatile cover crop that provides some Nitrogen to the soil and a stunning splash of color in the spring. The bees love it but so do the gophers. If gophers are a significant problem consider planting sour clover, repudiated to repel gophers. Bell beans, or fava beans, are a standard annual nitrogen fixing legume. It is a good idea to mix the beans with a small amount of barley to help hold the stand upright. Also the barley germinates under many different conditions and will hold the soil if erosion is a significant threat. This strategy is especially useful in a newly planted site.

Enjoy the elegance and reward of fruit well ripened. Taste the depth of the fresh juice. Raise a glass to the beautiful promise of the 2008 vintage.

Buena suerte.

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