

**Vine Talk. Winter 2010.** Wow, amazing to think that we are through the first decade of the new millennium. The vines remain fast asleep except for a precocious few that cling to leaves due to vigor issues or youth. The heavy rains in January delayed pruning in many sites. When you do get in to your vineyard, focus first on blocks that need the longest hang time and those that grow with the most vigor. Syrah, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and varieties that have a longer production season are a good place to start. Many growers are delaying the pruning of Pinot Noir to either encourage longer hang time in hotter spots or more favorable conditions at bloom. Late pruning also discourages Eutypa. Cane pruning is effective in cooler sites to enhance conditions for a more even bud break and robust set. Prune for balance. If you had too much vigor last year leave more buds or a kicker cane that can be cut off later. Weak positions need to be cut back to one bud or consider laying down a fresh cordon.

Many other activities demand attention in the vineyard this time of year. The rains have encouraged massive weed growth and now is the time to get control. There is a new organic spray on the market called GreenMatch that looks very promising and is advertised as the organic equivalent of Roundup. Another approach during wet weather is propane flaming of young weeds. Conventional sprays of Round up or Chateau are also applied in band width beneath the vines at this time. Hoeing is always an option. Timing and consistency is the key to success with any weed control strategy. Whatever you choose it is imperative to deal with the weeds now before they become a truly monumental task. Weeds can suffocate a young vineyard and they can suppress growth in a maturing vineyard. A little competition from weeds on a vigorous site can be a good thing but keep them low growing. Weeds provide habitat for pest and disease organisms and prevent air flow in the vineyard. Deal with them now.

As the soil warms up the first generations of gophers are eagerly arriving on the scene. Again now is the time to get control of this pest before it multiplies exponentially and becomes a real menace to the vines. Cinch traps are easy to use and do not require a permit. See the VASCM website archives for more information on them. Everyone has a story on how to control gophers. Pick a method and do it now before they are three generations ahead of you and have established tunnels more extensive than tour packages at a Club Med. There is a reason for the phrase “Happy as a gopher in sand!”

If you experienced significant disease issues last year be sure to apply a dormant spray of lime sulfur if possible while the vines are still completely dormant. Lime Sulfur is available as an organic product but it is still a Category I material. This means that the owner must personally pour the liquid concentrate into the tank if using any container over 1 gallon. Employees are required to use a closed system. Check your options carefully. Lime sulfur is a very effective broad spectrum fungicide that will reduce disease pressure before it starts.

Apply a regular fungicide spray of either JMS Stylet oil or sulfur (one or the other not together) at bud break. This is an essential practice for early powdery mildew control whether you apply a dormant spray or not. If you did apply lime sulfur be sure to wait at least 3 weeks before using any oil. Early sprays are best applied as a wash to allow penetration of the material into the crevices in the bark of the vine.

There are some exciting new chemistries out there to combat powdery mildew as well as other grape diseases. Regalia is an organic fungicide that was developed by the same people that developed Serenade and Sonata. Actinovate is a biological fungicide advertised to suppress powdery mildew and botrytis. Scala is a new chemistry designed to prevent Botrytis at bloom. There are new oils on the market that provide an alternative to stylet oil. Rotate your spray materials to keep pest resistance down.

If you had a cover crop this winter consider carefully when to mow or disc it in for maximum nitrogen recovery if that is your goal. Legumes are an excellent source of nitrogen. In some cases they can release too much too fast if put into the system near bloom. Consider the growth pattern of the vines and nutrient requirements of your vineyard before cutting the cover crop. You might consider mowing or disking an abundant crop in stages to reduce nitrogen impact all at once. Incorporating the cover crop before a rain will more quickly release nutrients than if you do it during a dry spell. Late winter is an excellent time to apply compost amendments. These will readily blend with the warm wet soil to provide a rich environment for nutrient exchange as needed by the roots.

Finally take another look at last year and decide what went right and what could be better. Visit your winemaker (which may mean look in the mirror) and evaluate the wines from 2009. Take the opportunity to fully participate in the amazing process of vine to wine. Tasting the wine now will help to guide your decisions and aid your commitment to an outstanding vintage 2010.

Happy New Year!  
Prudy Foxx  
Foxx Viticulture  
Santa Cruz Mountains