

WINE GRAPE INFORMATION FOR PENNSYLVANIA AND THE REGION

From Penn State Cooperative Extension

Table of Contents

1. Yikes! Warm weather and pruning
2. Pruning Grapevines
3. Upcoming Meetings: Pruning workshop in York, Bugs and Birds in Hershey, Vit 07 in NY and much more...
4. 2007 Regional Vit/Enol Events Calendar

Grapevines and a Warm Winter (attachment)

I'm not going to venture into the climate change quagmire but it is hard not to notice that it has been quite warm so far this winter. The crocuses are up in our yard and I can't help but feel a bit uneasy about this. But what effect does the warm temperatures have on grape vines in our region? I have been getting a lot of inquiries about the health of vines and whether or not it is safe to prune. To be perfectly honest, I do not know. I have never been in a situation like this. I am ill at ease hearing reports of sap moving and buds swelling. In a conversation with a horticulturist he explained that once the sap is moving in the vascular system it is prone to freezing and damage and that buds, once pushed will not miraculously recede back into their prior dormant positions. There are, of course, many wine growing regions that have warmer winters than ours, like California. There vines tend to go dormant later than ours and wake up earlier. I do not see any problems with pruning right now. The threat of cold injury to vines arise if we get some sudden and dramatic shift downward in temperature, e.g. a 60 degree day plunging into a 10 degree night. There have been a few such events in memory that have caused widespread damage, including the January freeze of 03/04. All of this said, I defer to my wiser and smarter colleagues, in this case Dr. Tony Wolf, the viticulturist for Virginia Tech. His technician, Kay Miller, did some controlled freeze evaluation of buds in the research vineyard and found them to be still quite cold hard. Examples include the median LTEs for Merlot (-0.9F), Chardonnay (+0.3F) and Cabernet Franc (-6.5F). This doesn't mean we are "out of the woods" but it does indicate that even in warmer Virginia the buds are retaining their cold hardiness. As for pruning, my suggestion is that you continue to prune as you would normally. Prune in order of hardiness and relative economic value of the species/variety and their location relative to the threat of cold injury. As a rule, try to wait as late into the winter to prune but that will be different for a grower with 50 acres vs. 50 vines. I have included Tony's article from his Viticulture Notes and thank him for sharing this information with us.

Pruning Grapevines (attachment)

I wish there was a standard formula for pruning grape vines. Balance pruning for node counts might be the closest thing we have to a formula but that does not take into account shaping a vine which is critical to training and canopy management. There are so many subtleties to pruning a vine and each vine has a hundred questions that need to be

answered before you make the first cut. While there is clearly a textbook form it seems that few vines cooperate to attain that shape. Yet, it is a really good idea for every grower to have specific goals of form and size in mind when pruning, both in general for a block of vines and for each individual vine. Beyond that, developing a concept of what a utopian vine would be on your site is not a bad exercise. It may never be attained but can certainly be worked towards. At Temperance Hill we had over 50,000 vines that needed to be pruned every winter. While I didn't prune all of them I certainly managed to whack a few thousand. It seemed like distressingly few conformed to the ideal form and balance. But that is something that has to be achieved over years of work of training and managing a vine for balance. On the utopian vine, of course, shoots grow to just the right length and stop growing at exactly the right time and each vine has the ideal amount of fruit that will fully ripen in the current season. Hopefully the vine spacing, training method and trellis system will all converge into perfect balance. If this happens, pruning is pretty easy. But this doesn't happen very often so we must exert our own discipline over the vine. This means that pruning is an essential part of vine training during the critical early years of development. The vines shape will be a permanent reflection of your skills as a pruner. So you need to make the right decisions from the very start. This is often difficult for new growers who lack experience with shaping a vine. So how does one learn this often subjective but critical skill in the vineyard? There are some very good books that explain pruning but that's like trying to read about how to drive a standard shift car. Bad things happen. As far as I can tell in my experience the only way to learn how to prune is to do it with someone who knows how to do it correctly. Of course, correctly is the key term here. Despite the subjectivity of pruning there is a right and wrong way to do it. If you pick up bad habits early the vines will generally deteriorate in form and function to the point when they will lose quality, productivity and health. So those trying to learn should seek those who know how and learn from them. How do you know if someone is a good pruner? I think you can tell a lot by just looking at their vines both in summer and winter. Look at the overall shape, the quality of the cuts, the positioning of spurs and canes, the straightness of the trunks and much more. These are all signs that the pruning was done properly. Oh, and taste their wines. If the vines are out of whack the wines probably will taste the same way. There is a particular look to a well pruned vine. How you arrive there can be varied. Balance pruning by node counts can work but many prefer a more visual approach. The latter is really only effective with experience. Even though we strive for uniformity in each vine and vineyard, every vine is, in fact, different and needs its own particular care. I try to demonstrate correct pruning in my workshops. It isn't easy but hopefully students get the general idea of what they are trying to achieve in pruning and why. But I always encourage them to volunteer to work for a vineyard for a few days, weeks, months so they can learn the craft well and so it sticks with them. I have attached an article I wrote on balance pruning last year. I hope it might make the concept a little bit easier to understand.

Upcoming Meetings (attachment):

A second **PRUNING WORKSHOP** is being offered in Pennsylvania at Naylor Wine

Cellars from 9-noon on Tuesday, February 6. It costs \$20 and pre-registration is requested. A workshop brochure is attached to this message.

Please note that there are four pruning workshops being offered in Maryland in February. Please consult the 07 Regional Events Calendar for details.

If a quick overview of **what it takes to start a commercial wine grape vineyard** would be helpful to you I am giving a one hour talk about it at the SE PA Crops Conference at the Days Inn in Allentown, PA on Tuesday, January 23 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. I will cover (very quickly) grape varieties, site selections, varieties, clones and rootstocks, vineyard design, trellis and training and early vineyard care. For information and registration please contact the Lehigh County Cooperative Extension office at 610-391-9840

We will talk about **Bugs and Birds in Vineyards** at the Grape Section of the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention from 9-4 on Tuesday, January 30th at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center in Hershey, PA. Core and category pesticide credits for NJ and PA applicators will be available. Dr. Doug Pfeiffer from Virginia Tech will talk about new spray materials, soft materials and IPM for insect control. Marty Keen from Landey Vineyards will update us on his NESARE-funded Grape Root Borer research which has had a very positive impact on his older vineyard. Andy Muza, PSU Cooperative Extension in Erie will talk about scouting methods and control options for Grape Berry Moth. For information and registration please go to <http://www.shaponline.org/> (please note the grape program has change).

Viticulture 2007 is a major meeting that is held in New York every other year. It brings speakers from around the world to talk on a wide range of viticulture topics. This year it is in Rochester, NY from February 7-9. I know that Rochester seems like a long way to go but for this caliber of information it may well be worth the time and expense. I encourage you to look at the program at <http://www.viticulture2007.org/>.

Attachments:

[Balanced Vines and Balanced Pruning v41.doc](#)

[Grapevine bud cold hardiness Jan07.doc](#)

[Grapevine Pruning Workshop 020607 Naylor.pdf](#)

[VitEnolEventsJan07.doc](#)

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