

## WINE GRAPE INFORMATION FOR PENNSYLVANIA AND THE REGION

From Penn State Cooperative Extension

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The Endless Mountains: I wrote about the wonders of new cold hardy varieties this summer after a visit to northern Vermont. Now they have been discovered much closer to home in the Endless Mountains of northeast Pennsylvania. I write about my visit to this region and its extraordinary people and wines.

Sorting grapes for quality: You know this is one of my soap-box issues, sorting fruit whenever and however before it gets dumped into a press or fermenter. I noted a particularly effective example of conscientious grape sorting this vintage and asked Nelson Stewart to describe the equipment and process he has developed.

Cover crops: Since controlling vine vigor is one of the greatest challenges confronting wine growers in the east, this recent Wines and Vines/Wine East article by Jim Law at Linden Vineyards is very important. I wanted to make sure that you had a chance to read it. Jim is learning how to use cover crops as a tool to manage vigor and he shares some of his ideas and experience here. Jim Law has been in this business for a long time. Jim does more than see what is happening in his vineyard, he observes, then thinks critically and takes action. I hope you read his columns, as I do, religiously in Wine East (now Wines and Vines) because there is more to learn there than in any classroom.

Vintage view: I don't have the same view of the vintage as you but since I travel around a bit when you don't have time, I can share some of my observations with you. Brad Knapp at Pinnacle Ridge Vineyards summed it up quite well, saying that, "in '07 anyone could make good wine. This year you had to know what you were doing to make good wine." That's pretty much explains the difference between a dry and a wet vintage. This harvest was punctuated by two main weather events although there were plenty of small ones in between - Hanna in early September and one of those pesky low pressure systems that come up from the south and stalled over us for 3-4 days during the last weekend of September. Many of the whites were off before the latter event so those are tasting very good now. Merlot in SE PA got caught off guard and some of it got a bit washed out. As usual, crop load was critical to achieving ripeness and getting fruit off of the vine early, hopefully beating the rain events. I'd sure like to see more crop estimating and adjusting before veraison in our vineyard, even hybrids like Chambourcin and Vidal. Canopy management always pays huge benefits, and also up front disease control, from the beginning of the season to the end. I mentioned in my last review that downy and powdery mildews were a problem this year in many vineyards, especially downy. I visited Dr. Elwin Stewart, our estimable plant pathology and vine decline expert at his 8-

acre Happy Valley Vineyard near State College. He told me that his vines were clean the whole year but he found the weather at the beginning of the season frightful and tightened up his intervals and kept his phosphorus acids applications at max rates. In many respects, you simply have to have the intuition about conditions and disease to make a decision like this but if you are in doubt and the crop may be at risk, you should either go for the full-throttle approach or consult with someone who has more experience about what to do. Many of the problems in our vineyards are of the "compound interest" nature and they get exponentially more severe if left unchecked in the early season. You can't hide, even if the weather gets better later on. We'll talk a lot more about disease control this winter. Growers get bored with it but there is still too many grapes whose quality is compromised by disease to ignore the problem. As Dr. Jim Travis has always told us, disease control with chemicals supports your canopy management practices, not the other way around. If you had problems with fruit ripeness and disease you should be thinking about the balance and size of your vines, the canopy architecture and growth, shoot spacing, shoot positioning and shoot thinning. Later in the season, this extends to fruit zone management with the same considerations. I know we know how to do most of this, it's usually just a matter of timing, availability of labor and money to pay the labor. But if your wish is to make really good wine, these practices are not optional. If you can't handle the disease, then it might be time to consider some of the disease resistant, cold hardy varieties mentioned in the previous article. By the way, Alice Wise on Long Island told me that she sprayed her Norton exactly once this year and it was completely clean. Where is genetic engineering when we need it? Dr. Stewart was hilling up when the small fruits class visited his vineyard. The soil was in perfect condition. If you haven't done it yet, better get out there soon.

### **Attachments**

- [Cover Crops Law.doc](#)
- [Endless Mountains 2008.doc](#)
- [Sorting Grapes Stewart.doc](#)

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