

## **VINE TALK**

**Set 2009.** Somehow through the fog and cold and the unseasonable spring and early summer weather we still have managed to arrive at fruit set. Now one can truly take stock of the value of the year. Ideally you see full, clean clusters with uniform berry size evenly spaced along the cordon.

This is the year of canopy management. The most successful set that I have seen in different sites has been where the vines were properly shoot thinned to allow airflow and access for insects and spray penetration into the canopy. If the interior of the canopy was too crowded there was a far higher incidence of botrytis and the flowers turned brown and fell off of the cluster without setting fruit. A successful set also seemed to relate to the health of the vine. Weak vines were more prone to shatter and botrytis.

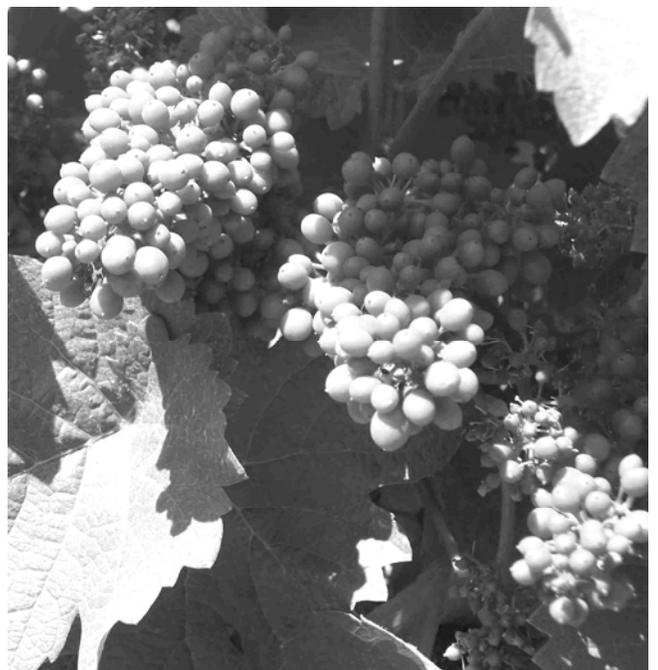
If you experienced shatter (clusters where berries fell off or never set) in your vineyard you must perform the unpleasant task of removing deformed clusters where only a few berries cling to an empty stem. If allowed to go to harvest the wine will reflect the bitter stems more than the fruit. Work with your winemaker to determine their level of tolerance for this condition in the clusters.

Many vineyards set unscathed despite seemingly numerous opportunities for disaster. Now it is time for leaf removal. This is a delicate topic and like so many things is very vineyard specific. Sites that are directly exposed to the sun (south facing, high elevation sites with low vigor) may want to reduce the amount of leaf pulling in the fruit zone or not do it at all. Sites that have more vigor or where there is a wider range of temperature and fog variation will want to implement some form of this practice. Most vineyards will have their leaves removed on the North or East side of the canopy or where the fruit is in the shade in the afternoon.

In a normal year one might remove leaves just below the cluster and maybe one node above. In a cold year like this it might be necessary to remove more leaves to ensure that the canopy is open enough to allow airflow from one side to the other. No fruit likes full exposure to the afternoon sun. That said, different clones and varieties respond differently to varying degrees of leaf removal. Again, check in with your winemaker and compare notes from last year to determine the level of leaf pulling required this year. It is clear from research that early leaf removal (just after set) is the best policy for preventing sun burn. By exposing the clusters to a moderate amount of early summer sun they have time to develop their own protection against the brutal rays of late summer. Remember to always leave some filtered shading on the clusters and never fully expose them to the afternoon sun.

The last word on canopy management is to be prepared for the unexpected. A cold day today could easily become a record high the next day. Be vigilant and pay attention to the weather forecast. Never overexpose the fruit to sun.

It is around the fourth of July so there may be some vineyards that are getting that surprise visit from powdery mildew. If you see the white powder on your fruit it unfortunately means that you either missed a spray, or the spray didn't get into the canopy or that your vineyard may have developed resistance to the sprays you are using. If you see black specks along side the white powder the in-festation is probably well advanced and will



be hard to eradicate. Your best course of action is to use an eradicant spray to wash down the fruit. Oxidate or Armicarb are among your options. If the weather is not too hot for a few days you might consider Stylet Oil. Sulfur is not an eradicant and is unlikely to solve your problem. Realize that you are in a fight and be vigilant with the sprays from now until veraison if you see mildew. You may have to open up the canopy even more than you normally would to ensure coverage as most eradicant sprays depend upon contact to be effective.

Hopefully this is not your problem and your fruit is clean. Concentrate instead on keeping the canopy open, protecting against botrytis if there is a series of wet mornings, and consider your options for irrigation and fertilization.

The grape clusters are sizing up at this time and if you want bigger clusters you will have to feed them. Review your petiole samples or vineyard history and determine what nutrients might be appropriate at this time. Do not be afraid to water and add nutrients to your vines if they need them. Healthy fruit makes great wine. Vines that are starved for water and nutrients during the ripening phase have the potential to shrivel up to nothing when the heat is on in late summer. Smaller cluster varieties and thin skinned clones are especially prone to this problem. Planned deficit irrigation and monitored stress on the vines does not mean starvation and anorexia. Take care of your vines and the fruit will ripen to its greatest potential.

Walk the vineyard, clean it up, and make it beautiful. Veraison is around the corner.

Buena suerte.

Prudy Foxx  
Foxx Viticulture  
Santa Cruz Mountains