

Bloom and Set 2009. Another great year springs forth. As usual, nothing is predictable. We have had cold temperatures, light frost, record highs, and back to fog. The wind seems unstoppable some days. It is another year in the life of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The last heat wave drove the shoots to new lengths. Many vineyards are showing vigorous growth with robust buds that promise full succulent clusters of fruit. Now is the time to carefully consider the foliar spray program. The focus is on flowering and fruit set. Other factors such as weeds, gophers, and mildew remain a part of the plan.

Start off by reviewing the vineyard history. If you have a recent petiole or leaf blade analysis review this to spot nutrient deficiencies or imbalances. Pay close attention to the zinc and boron levels. Last year if you noticed an excess of big and little berries in the clusters your vines may have a deficiency of these minerals. Include these micronutrients in your foliar spray program pre bloom if you have the need. Pay special attention to Boron levels as too much can be just as detrimental as too little.

Notice nitrogen levels as well. As much as you do not want to encourage excessive vegetative growth in the vines your vineyard still may need a shot of this important protein source. If you have not taken bloom time tissue samples in the past make a point of doing it this year. Little adjustments can go a long way in proper cluster formation and excellent fruit.

Talk to your winemaker about the chemical analysis of the wine. Discuss how well the fruit went through fermentation. Find out if there were nutritional issues that may have affected the process. It is not a direct line from fruit to juice analysis and fermentation but there are definite correlations that bear scrutiny. Work together and taste the fruit of your labor!

Canopy management is the other big focus at this time. Shoot thinning is often a good idea. It opens up the canopy and allows for air flow, banded lighting, and spray penetration. Give the healthy shoots with good looking buds space to develop without being crowded up against water shoots and weaker tissue. Favor the shoots that grow out of buds from spurs chosen during winter pruning. Generally the basal buds are less fruitful. It should be obvious at this point where the fruit is forming. Retain shoots with healthy clusters in favorable upright growth positions. It is also a good idea to keep a few shoots that grow from the cordon or lower on the spur even if these don't have fruit. This will give you options for next year and help prevent the problem of "spur creep" (where the spurs get too tall).

Get your spray program on schedule. The Davis IPM program has contributed greatly to wine grape production with their powdery mildew model based on weather conditions. This model really helps to improve efficiency of the spray program but it does not replace it. Powdery mildew is very difficult to see this time of year. It usually does not show as a white powder now unless you have an infection that is really advanced. More likely any mildew spores on the grapes are still in the early stages of population explosion. Get sprays on early to ensure complete coverage. I favor the sprays that eradicate mildew (JMS Stylet Oil) over those that suppress it (sulfur). Systemic sprays used at this time may not be able to keep up with the rapid tissue expansion. There are many new organic options on the market and with good canopy management and favorable weather these can be effective. This is a decision you will have to make for yourself. What is important is to open up

the canopy and get a spray on to prevent mildew from establishing or expanding in the vineyard before you see it. Do not wait for fruit set for the white powder to show on your fruit. By then it will be too late and though you may reduce the problem you will never completely overcome it in the same year once established.

Finally seek out your winemaker and congratulate them on a job well done. The wines of the Santa Cruz Mountains get better every year and we are really making a splash on the pages of journalism and in wine competitions everywhere. Thank you to everyone for contributing to our growing success!

In the words of Nicolas Joy: Keep going!
Buena suerte.

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