



Some general pruning rules that I have learned over the years...

Balance:

- Wherever possible keep trellis full, vines in full production for maximum balance yield, quality and profit...
- ... however, correct vine balance trumps a full trellis. If a vine does not have enough vigor to fill the trellis, do not force it carry more buds/fruit that it wants to.
- Understand the relationship between vine size and balance.
- Use cane length and diameter as a guide to balance
- Pruning is the first opportunity to regulate crop. Understand the correct yield per vine for the wine that will be produced.
- Young vines should be pruned to shape and to encourage root development
- Vines > 5 years may be pruned and balanced according to Richard Smart's Golden Rules (with local adjustments). *See Sunlight into Wine.*
- Learn to recognize balance in your own vineyard and prune accordingly

Learning to prune:

- Learn to prune from an experienced and skillful/correct pruning instructor
- You cannot learn how to properly prune a grapevine by reading a book or watching a video.
- Anticipate. If something goes away, how will you most quickly replace it?
- Always be aware of the height of the head of the vine relative to the fruit wire
- Pruning, training and trellis are intermingled. Understand the relationships.

Canes and cordons:

- Decide early on about the relative merit of head training/cane pruning vs. cordon/spur.
- Cane pruning may lower incidence of disease by reducing the surface area of old wood
- Cane length should not exceed 2-2.5 feet
- In a dense canopy, prune for sun canes
- Replace cordon arms as spur positions deteriorate

Considerations in cold regions:

- Leave renewal spurs in the head area of the vine for both cane and cordon
- Consider renewal parts from the base of the vine in case of winter injury.
- Check wood quality, especially in cane pruning for dead wood at the terminal end of canes.
- Adjust node numbers according to bud damage assessments
- Avoid bull canes
- Consider double pruning to delay bud break in frost prone areas
- Prune from least valuable (first) to most valuable varieties (last)

Other pruning principles:

- Have a concept of what you are pruning towards visually, philosophically and economically.
- Always have a destination when pruning. Prune towards something – shape, size, yield, etc.
- Prune for crop first, position second and always for vine shape, think a year or 2 ahead.
- Efficiency: prune well to improve the efficiency of all vineyard operations and practices.
- Start pruning after vines are completely dormant. Prune in this order, natives > hybrids > vinifera, whites then reds.
- Stop, look and think: check and select fruiting wood first then prune around it.
- Measure twice, cut once rule. Once you make the cut it's gone.
- Do not use laterals for fruiting wood.
- Make clean cuts, close to the old wood (the secret is a very sharp pruning tool).
- When disbudding use the flat side of the shear against the older wood.
- Use the right tool for the right cut, if you are twisting or laboring you do not have the right tool (carry a saw, loppers, hand shears and a sharpening stone).
- Leave ½ to 1 inch between the terminal bud and tip of canes and spurs
- Cut with angle down so sap drains away from the terminal bud
- Do not let spurs get too long, look for and retain replacement shoots during the growing season.
- Leave a minimum of 6" between end of cordons and canes on the fruit wire
- Prune to 5/8 inch or pencil diameter.
- Vigorous vines: more buds. Weak vines: fewer buds.
- Be aware of and check for trunk diseases: Eutypa, Botryosphaeria, Petri disease.
- Treat large pruning wounds.
- Keep pruning tools clean, sharp, and oiled
- Sanitize if there is disease: clorox in a spray bottle.
- Remove cluster mummies and all infected wood from the vine and the vineyard.
- Do not cut wires, stakes or fingers
- Leave extra canes or spurs, double prune, for insurance
- Be careful when cutting away laterals, do not cut the bud.
- Remove old tendrils.
- Remove old ties and junk on the trellis.
- Mark vines with problems or that need to be re-visited right away.
- Dress properly for pruning against cold and rain. You'll work better if you are comfortable.

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