



WINE GRAPE INFORMATION FOR PENNSYLVANIA AND THE REGION

From Penn State Cooperative Extension

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2011: not pretty. I think this was a puzzling and frustrating vintage for many winegrowers in the East, particularly along the corridor that got hammered by Irene and Lee. The numbers were jumbled, despite adequate heat summation the sugar stopped accumulating in mid-September and it never dried out enough to make a difference. Yet, wine makers appear optimistic that flavors and phenolics are at levels that can make good wines, maybe not great, but hopefully in many cases very good. I traveled around the region quite a bit, including to Long Island, the center of *vinifera* production in the East and saw and tasted a lot of vineyards and wines. In discussing the situation in vineyards with growers and extension educators, there was certainly not a lot of obvious solutions to the fruit rot problems. The downy mildew, given all the rain, was expected and some growers controlled it better than others. We got mired in a witches brew of biotic and abiotic conditions that just would never let this vintage stand up straight. Downy mildew, botrytis, and sour rot were all encouraged by rain, warm days and nights, wet soils, splitting berries, early and ferocious bird predations, yellow jackets, ants, fruit flies and whatever else wanted to jump into the fray. There is no silver bullet for a vintage like this but I made a list of suggestions that might help grape growers in the future to survive this kind of vintage conditions and, in particular, fruit rots. It all begins with vine balance:

- Although it is probably too late for most, the most important defense against disease and unripe fruit is a high quality vineyard site that will create a balanced vine. Find a place that will grow the smallest vine necessary to meet production and quality goals for the type, style and price point of wine you intend to make. Use Richard Smart's rules of balance as a general guide for vine balance. We learned this harvest that smaller, open vines had less disease and riper fruit, and often picked earlier.
- . . . then properly design and develop a vineyard that will take full advantage of the virtues of the site, including slope, local topographic features, aspect, etc. Consider planting disease resistant varieties
- Avoid trees around the vineyard
- If planting *vinifera* or some hybrids, choose the right rootstock
- Once the vineyard is in production, read the season in the spring and plan accordingly: IPM, canopy management, fruit management, etc.
- The spray program is very, very important. The sprayer must be properly calibrated, the correct materials used at the right time, it all has to fit together.

- Control botrytis!
- Captan, Flint and Pristine have been called out as broad spectrum fungicides that may help with sour rot. Plan the spray program so these will be available later in the season.
- Canopy management in our cool, and often damp climate is SO much more important than in dry wine regions. Pruning, achieving balance, 3-5 shoots per foot, uncluttered head and inter-vine area, hedging and, perhaps most important, timely and correct leaf removal, with a nod towards trace bloom on tight clustered varieties, will all help to mitigate disease. Get air/wind, light/heat, spray materials etc. into the fruit zone and interior of the canopy.
- Birds – net the vineyard, no debate, just do it. Use the right and best net material.
- Deer, raccoons, yellow jackets, etc. – deal with them as best you can.
- Fruit – do not overcrop, distribute clusters evenly in the fruit zone, clusters should never be touching
- Set up to sort fruit, in the vineyard, before the harvester goes through, if possible before the destemmer.
- Talk to your wine maker. He or she has to make wine from the fruit.

Vineyard sanitation comments from Dr. Tony Wolf, Virginia Tech (printed with permission and appreciation): I've had several requests for advice on what to do with grape clusters that remain in the trellis, those that were not fit to be harvested for one reason or another. I suspect others have the same question. Clusters that were affected by disease organisms such as botrytis could serve as a source of inoculum for those diseases in the coming season. The conventional wisdom is to remove these clusters from the trellis so that they are not in close proximity to susceptible tissues next year. But should the clusters be dropped on the ground or removed from the vineyard and destroyed by burying, burning or composting? My own opinion – and our practice here at Winchester – is to remove the clusters from the vine and toss them in the grassed row middles where they can be mowed/shredded with the season's final cover crop mowing to hasten their decomposition. Notice that I said in the "row middles", not on the soil under the trellis where decomposition might take longer (and where the clusters would be that much closer to new growth next spring).

Yes, if you had nothing else to do and wanted to perhaps achieve an *incremental* increase in inoculum reduction, the unharvested clusters could be collected and removed from the vineyard rather than dropping in row middles. The choice is really a matter of vineyard scale and labor availability, and your personal convictions about vineyard sanitation. I ran the question by two grape pathologists and essentially got a confirmation of the shred in place (row middle) recommendation. Wayne Wilcox at Cornell University added that it's also important to consider the thoroughness of removing the clusters from the trellis. His point was that if you're going to remove the clusters from the vines, be sure to do a good job of it, regardless of whether the clusters are dropped in the row middles or removed from the vineyard. Wayne used the analogy of protective fungicide sprays –if you're going to apply fungicides (and most of us do), make darn sure that you're getting good coverage. If you remove affected clusters from the trellis, try to remove them all.

This approach to sanitation will NOT eliminate the disease threats next season, but it can help with disease management. As Mizuho Nita mentioned when we talked about this issue, your approach to sanitation this fall will not be worth much if you miss a critical spray or two next spring.

I can predict that the next question would be: What about secondary clusters? Should they all be removed too? Chances are, the secondary clusters would be removed during dormant pruning and probably don't have quite the rot issues that the primary crop might have suffered. Here too the follow-up question would be: Remove prunings (and secondary clusters) from vineyard, or shred them in row middles? We currently shred the canes in our own vineyard, but I'm leaning towards removal and burning in the future – not for fruit rot issues but more related to concerns about vascular, wood-rotting pathogens. That's a different story though. I'll comment on some of the observations of the harvest period in our next Viticulture Notes. It's good to see this harvest coming to a close.

Dr. Tony K. Wolf, Professor of Viticulture. Director, AHS Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Let's talk and learn from it: After the harvest dust settles it may be a good idea to get together as growers and wine makers and talk about this vintage. As in every situation, there are winners and losers. I saw vineyards that were almost squeaky clean this harvest. What in the world did those growers do to achieve those results?? I, for one, would like to know. I know the tendency is to forget and move on, but this one, even more than 2009, I believe deserves some retrospection. I'll get together a panel of growers, grape pathologists and wine makers to look back at the vintage and see what we can learn just in case this happens again. We will video teleconference this meeting to key wine area locations in Pennsylvania and New York. More information to come about this meeting.

Long Island Viticulture: I have tooted this horn before but now I'm leaning hard on it after a recent visit to Long Island and tasting so many excellent wines, even from this vintage. There is a level of skill and excellence there, along with the necessary investment and passion, that doesn't exist in that concentration anywhere else in the East. The best producers are setting the standard for wine growers in our region. You can read my [Long Island notes](#) but I really encourage the serious commercial wine grower to visit, learn and taste for yourself. It's not far away and so worth it.

Bordeaux in Pennsylvania: It's not often that a home-grown Pennsylvania boy falls in love with a French girl and moves to Bordeaux to join a wine family (sounds like a good movie) but, hey, that's just what **Daren Miller** did! He's from York County and has been living in Bordeaux for 15 years. The family owns two estates: [Chateau Haut Beyzac](#) in the Haut-Medoc and [Chateau des Tourtes](#) in the Cote de Blaye region on the Right Bank about 40 miles north of Bordeaux. If Bordeaux reds, and possibly whites, are in our future in Pennsylvania, then a continuing dialogue with someone like Daren can only help us. We had an excellent, way too short, conversation with him at Grace Winery which you can read about in the [features section of PWGN](#).

Vineyards and Wineries of Southwest Pennsylvania: If Pennsylvania's wine landscape is anything it is diverse. Denise Gardner and I took a 2-day tour through vineyards and cellars east of Pittsburgh and encountered the challenges of high altitude, cool/cold climate wine growing, great creativity and perseverance, and many remarkable wines. Wine appears in very unlikely places all over the world but there are passionate people trying to grow and make it everywhere. We visited Sharon Klay at Christian W Klay, Steve Adelman at Glades Pike and Jean Manspeaker at Briar Valley. Link to it in the [features section of PWGN](#).

View from the Vineyard: A Practical Guide to Sustainable Winegrape Growing by Cliff Ohmart is a new viticulture book that I highly recommend to wine growers in the East. Cliff is a friend and the closest thing in private industry to an extension educator. He was the brains and dedication behind the highly respect Lodi Winegrower's Workbook, one of the standard texts for sustainable wine growing in the U.S. This book summarizes much of Cliff's experience in sustainable wine growing. Winter is coming and you'll need some good viticulture books to read by the fireplace. This should be one of them. It can also be ordered from [Amazon.com](#).