



The Irrigation System

No irrigation system is good enough to replace deep winter rains. We need rain and we need it starting soon.

If we have a very dry winter be prepared to start watering early. Lack of rain also affects winter fertilizing, weed control, transplanting and line post repair.

Pre-Pruning

Many of us like to pre-prune the vines, starting in December. As soon as the leaves are mostly off your vineyard you can cut off all but the lowest 7-8 buds. That's usually about 12" of cane from last year's growth. We choose that length for two reasons. One, it makes it easier to see the final pruning decisions that need to be done quickly later in the spring. And two, early bud break always happens on the 2 highest buds on the cane. Too early bud break will need to be cut off and may actually be frozen off if we get a rare hard frost in February or March. It don't want those sacrificed buds to be the ones that should have born fruit next year.

Transplanting

Every vineyard loses a few plants each year. You should have an active nursery row or have access to replacement plants. Winter rains (if they occur) provide a great environment for getting those new plants into the ground. Healthy, rooted growing plants are more likely to survive in an existing vineyard row. There is a lot of root competition where ever you try to place a new vine. Cuttings have a very hard time getting started in an existing row.

Use transplanting fertilizers and large enough planting holes to give them a good start.

Replacement Plants or Cuttings

Plan now for the 2018/2019 transplanting season. If you have a "no cuttings" contract with your nursery, work with them to keep your nursery row populated. I suspect that the fires in Napa & Sonoma this year will create a lot of pressure on the nurseries. We may have a hard time getting small orders of vines in a timely manner, on the rootstocks we need. Talk to them as soon as you can.

If you like to use cuttings, this month is a good time to get them in the ground. Use rooting hormones and consistent water to get them started. I find that two cuttings in each location give better results .