



Yes, Birds and Bees - it is time to start worrying about ripening fruit.

Remember: these are my thoughts and what I do in the vineyard. If you have better ideas please respond with additional information!

Powdery & Downey Mildew Control

I hope you are spraying for Powdery Mildew continuously through the season. Hot weather may change your schedule. NEVER spray sulfur when temps are above the mid 90's - the sulfur will burn the leaves. I have heard that Stylet Oil has the same rules, but I'm not sure. I don't use oil so if someone has information, please share.

Downey mildew has been seen in a few Ramona vineyards this year. So far, again, it seems to be most likely in Grenache and Aglianico. Proper rotations including Pristine and copper have kept it under control.

We want to continue the spray program until veraison is complete. Even then, don't stop spraying Dipel to keep skeletonizers under control. AND IF IT RAINS ON RIPE BUNCHES - have a spray program of Luna or equivalent ready to go. Bunch rot caused by rain soaked grapes can ruin your entire crop in very short time.

Water

Most of this year we've been ahead of the water curve. The really hot weather in June has changed that. I am noticing some stressed vines and a few drying (unripe) grape clusters. Don't let the soil get too dry. Rich McClellan says that once you let the soil dry out, drip irrigation cannot catch up. I'll be watering a few deep cycles this month and then keep smaller doses on nursery rows and transplanted vines.

Bird & Bee Netting

I have often said, we are not growing wine grapes, we are growing bird candy. Veraison is just starting, the sugar level in the grapes is moving from 10% up to 15% as veraison happens. A few trend setting grapes in every vineyard are ahead of the curve and reaching that wonderful-for-birds 18% sugar content (18 Brix). We don't want the birds to figure out where there next meal is coming from. It is best to deploy bird netting before veraison completes. Birds eat grapes, but usually they just peck at them. The real damage is made by bees and yellow jackets which hollow out the entire fruit. That is bad! But grabbing a bunch of grapes with the business end of a bee or wasp pointing out is seriously not fun!

You have probably noticed that many big grape growing regions don't use bird netting. They have so many grapes that they overpower the bird population. The birds need to balance their numbers with whatever is available for food throughout the year. Massive amounts of grapes for only 1 or 2 months are more than they can consume. Table grapes in the Central Valley have the added protection that they are picked so early - before they are perfect bird candy - that they remain perfectly unscathed.

Bird netting comes in many shapes and grid sizes. We started with "over the top" 16' wide, knitted cloth - with 3/4" grids. The bigger grid allowed easy sampling of grapes as they become ripe. About the same time, extruded plastic nets became available and everyone used some form of "over the top" netting. Both styles required storage, either indoors or near the vineyard.

Most vineyards today are using side netting. The size varies from 42" which covers only the fruiting area to 65" which easily goes over the top most years. If you have not chosen a size yet, check out the vineyards around you. Look at both sizes before deciding; each has pros and cons. Side netting can be attached year-around to an extra wire 10" or so below the cordon. It is also possible to deploy side netting from storage each year. Since the side netting is smaller, it is easier to handle in either scenario.

Hedging

Just before you deploy your bird netting you will have your last chance to control the sunlight reaching your grapes. "A well hedged vineyard is a work of art". Each grape cluster has the correct number of leaves above it to provide proper ripening, each cluster has the right amount of dappled sunlight to encourage proper chemical reactions for flavor and color. Also, a well hedged vineyard is a LOT easier to net.