



This is the critical month when all of the work you've done, all the footsteps in the vineyard and all the "good" luck you've had, pays off. If we get it right we pass great grapes on to the winemaker. Their job is merely to "not screw it up", and the result is great wine.

We are growing bird candy, the grapes are enticing birds to be seed delivery systems. The grape seeds are only useful when they reach physiological maturity, so the grapes wait to be most tasty when the seeds are ready. We are looking for that same state of ripeness.

Measuring your Grapes

1. test the Brix (percent of sugar) - your winemaker should know what she wants
2. test the pH - if the sugar is nearly good then,
3. test the titratable acid (TA), this test is time consuming so I don't do this until it matters.

Last month I attached a chart which shows target ratios of these number ... I have attached it again.

Grape Sensory Evaluation

You should not only decide by the numbers. There are many flavors, tannins and acids that indicate physiological maturity for the grapes that need to move in concert with the chemical tests. Here are a few easy ones to detect. The important thing to do is write it down so you can see the movement over time and compare one year to the next.

- > What is the flavor of the juice? - ignoring the sweetness of the sugar, are their varietal flavors, are there flavors of grass or green vegetable, does anything taste burned or raisened?
- > How pale or bright is the color? - does the color come out quickly or only after kneading the grapes, is the color clear, is it bright like a really good rose'?
- > how many of the seeds are fully dark brown? - only fully brown seeds are good enough for bird food.
- > Are the seeds chewy or crunchy? - crunchy seeds are mature, they crush easily between your teeth, chewy seeds get stuck in your teeth and are not yet mature.
- > Are the skins stringy or chewable? - the skins should break apart easily, if they are stringy they are not yet mature, flavors and colors are not fully synthesized.
- > Do the seeds have harsh tannins? - when chewing the seeds, do they release tannins that make the top of your mouth dry, are those tannins astringent on your tongue? If so they are not mature.
- > Are smooth tannins present in the skins? - late in the ripening process tannins move into the skins, these tannins are long-chain molecules that dry the top of your mouth and give smoothness to the wine. Look for this late change.

The Ramona Advantage - was it broken this year?

Long warm days, cool cloudy nights, low humidity and high-altitude sunshine give us a great advantage in Ramona. When all of these things come together we should be able to deliver balanced, ripe, mature grapes to the crush pad. This year we had a very cool spring, the "day the grapes died" on

July 6th and a full month of 95-105 temperatures during July. The month of August was closer to ideal as the temps moderated and cool nights returned. There is a good chance that this moderation happened while veraison was started. That might be good enough to preserve acids and develop rich flavors. We'll have to see - the proof is in the wine.

Watering from Veraison to Harvest

Last week's general meeting speaker may have been the most important talk we've ever had. Once veraison is started, the grapes become a chemical factory. Sugar is delivered from the leaves. The sugar provides chemical components, energy and that bird-enticing sweetness that is much stronger than almost any other fruit (that is what makes grapes so good for making alcohol). The grapes have reached their full size, the canes have mostly stopped growing and all that magical photosynthesis is dedicated to moving sugar into the grapes and fueling the chemical conversions that give us color and flavor in the wine.

During this period, Federico Casassa says: "DO NOT LIMIT THE WATER TO THE VINES". He says 'give them all the water they need to let photosynthesis do its work'. Deficit irrigation before veraison limits the size of the grapes (good) and limits the vegetative growth (good). But once veraison starts the vines need water to fuel the process.

We have this desert climate, with this wonderful gravel soil which hold almost no water. If we don't add water during ripening, there will be none available.

We only go through one session of grapegrowing and winemaking per year. That's not much of a life long experience*. Sharing between all of us enhances and multiplies that experience - it makes us all better faster.

** Lum Eisenman famously says that 'he has only made wine 60 times in his whole life, and hardly knows anything about it'.*