

VINEYARD CALENDER

JANUARY – The Pruning Month

A most important time, only highly skilled workers are used for this job. Grapes can only grow on new wood and pruning determines the vines growth and production for the next two years. Each vine is considered individually and only two canes are left on the vine - the cane chosen the previous year to provide this season's fruit and the cane destined to support next years fruit. All other wood is cut off the vine and later will be chopped up for mulch.

FEBRUARY – Wakey, Wakey!

Pruning is continuing but depending on the weather, vines will soon be 'waking up' from their winter dormancy period. This is a good time for general cleaning and maintenance. Wires along the trellis should be inspected and tightened, damaged posts repaired or replaced and winter snow and water drains and ditches cleaned and prepared for spring rains.

MARCH – The Sap Is Rising

Budburst month is one of the busiest times in the vineyard, the emerging buds are extremely delicate, they don't like frost! The first ploughing between the vine rows is completed; this enhances weed control through frost damage. Hand hoeing around and between the individual vines is done. This helps oxygenate the soil around the vines, is organically friendly and is especially important for the baby vines which can be easily choked by weeds. Weeds are then ploughed back into the soil to give the vines extra nutrients during the growing season (much better than adding chemical fertilizers). Pruned canes are trained to grow along the trellis by attaching them to the wires with ties.

APRIL – Replace and Renew

Dead vines are replaced with new Barbatelle [baby vines normally three years old]. There is a three year wait before they provide fruit suitable for winemaking. Humidity and damp may bring mildew so the first preventive dusting with copper sulphate is done. Other things grow along with the vines including wild artichokes and mint. Hoed back into the soil they make a great organic fertilizer. Vineyard may start to look a little untidy but it's not necessary to annihilate every plant that pokes its head up with a battery of chemical weed killers. The leaves develop and photosynthesis nourishes the vine, the vineyard looks alive again.

MAY – Spring Flowers But Not For Picking

The month of 'La Vite Fiorisce' in Italian, meaning flowering stage. Prayers are said to ward of hail storms that can damage the small delicate flowers. This critical time dictates the quantity of the next harvest. Warm dry weather during the few crucial days when the vine flowers, aids fertilisation. Wet or windy weather can lower fertilisation rates resulting in smaller crops. Flowering can also be a guide to the date for the next harvest which happens approximately 100 – 110 days later. Ploughing and hand hoeing continues to control weed growth and aerate the soil to prevent compaction. New growth is trained to develop between the second and third rows of trellis wire.

JUNE – By Jove We Have Grapes!

The month of 'fruit set' when pollination is complete and tiny grapes start to appear in the place of the flowers, a nerve-wracking time for wine growers. Light leaf pulling is started to encourage air circulation around the vines. Reducing the foliage helps colour development of red grapes. Constant vigilance is needed to check the growth and size of grape clusters. Depending on what nature is doing, crop thinning may be required; this practice is called 'green harvesting'. Allowing too much fruit development stresses the vine and reduces grape quality. Controlling yield results in higher quality wines. Daily passes through the vineyard to tie up the growing foliage to the trellis. The foliage should be inspected regularly for signs of disease or nutrient deficiencies and managed accordingly.

JULY – Colour Me Beautiful

The 'ripening' month when the grapes turn to their pre-harvest colour. White grapes become more golden. Red grapes start life a greenish white colour and gradually darken to become a bluish red. This is called 'veraison'. The important but laborious viticulture technique of 'leaf plucking' continues. The ripening bunches need sun and air circulation. Too much foliage can slow down or stop the ripening process. It can also support high levels of humidity around the grape bunches which encourages fungal diseases. The growing vine continues to rely on photosynthesis so skill is needed to avoid over doing leaf removal. Training new growth between the trellis wires continues. It is cut back when it has grown two leaves above the top of the trellis. It is important to leave at least 5 or 6 feet of vine to support the grape growth. Treatments continue according to conditions.

AUGUST – Pampering The Vine

With veraison complete depending on nature's mood, the grapes should have doubled in size. Constant checking is required to ensure yield is controlled and thinning out of bunches if necessary. Bottom leaves can be removed later in the month to expose grapes to the sun, this produces more sugar and intensifies the flavour. Late in the month testing of sugar content and acidity may be done on white grapes to try and predict harvest times. Vines are checked daily for signs of disease, excess humidity and general health. Any dead vines must cut at the bottom of the main trunk where it comes out of the ground. All dead wood and foliage from diseased vines should be burnt. Praying for good weather from now until the harvest is mandatory.

SEPTEMBER – Harvest Arrives

The testing and harvesting month. Testing of the grapes for readiness becomes a regular activity, if all is well the white grape harvest starts mid to end September. In the weeks before harvest the last preventive treatments are planned leaving a minimum of 20 days between any treatment and harvest. Weather forecasts are checked at least ten times a day.

OCTOBER – Hands Were Made For Picking Grapes

The month for harvesting the red Barbera. The grapes are tested daily and harvest delayed as long as possible before weather conditions impose a penalty. To ensure the grapes arrive at the cellar in perfect condition, harvesting is done by hand. Grapes are picked and put into red plastic boxes then transported by tractor to the cantina for crushing. Grape juice quickly oxidises when exposed to air with negative impacts on the eventual quality of the wine. Careful handling during harvesting reduces the percentage of grapes arriving at the cellar already split and leaking juice.

NOVEMBER – Preparation Is Everything

Earthing up for winter. Harvest done breath sigh of relief and then get out the plough for more ground mowing. It's a good time to plough in some manure or organic matter from the compost heap to provide extra nourishment for the vines winter hibernation. Falling vine leaves can be picked up and put on compost heaps. Any vines that have been damaged or died should be taken out and noted for replacement next year. The focus now really shifts to the winery.

DECEMBER – Play It Again Sam

The month when the cycle begins again. The vine is bare of leaves and looks dead, it's actually hibernating. The sap has gone down into the roots. The vines store of carbohydrates in its trunk and roots provides nourishment over the winter. General clearing up in the vineyard continues and then the cycle starts again with the commencement of pruning using the Guyot cane pruning technique. Freezing conditions but you can't wear gloves.



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enquiries@piedmontwine.com



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