

The Cycle of the Vines

Grapegrowing is a year round business, marked not by the passage of months but by the cycle of the vines. The romance of wine begins with the reality of the vineyard. To make a masterful wine, you must begin with the grape. Carneros grapes are famous for their quality, rooted in the terroir and the distinct character of the vineyard, producing wines that reflect their environment.

To the naked eye, vineyards tend to look the same, but each is unique in its soils, slope, sun, and wind exposure. As a result, the vine varieties and farming methods vary. Our growers experiment continuously to find the best combination of grape variety, rootstock, vineyard layout, planting patterns and husbandry techniques for a specific site.

The seasons of the year and the cycle of the vines are marked by Pruning, Bud Break, Bloom, Veraison and Harvest.

PRUNING

This is the season of rest and waiting. The vines are dormant; the wines are in the barrel. Winter, from November to March, is the season of rain and the tulle fog that forms inland. The vines are bare of leaves. This is pruning season when vineyard crews clip the old growth back to selected spurs that will grow into next year's crop. Piles of canes lie between the rows to be chopped and disked into the ground.



BUD BREAK

Bud Break signals that spring is near. Shoots grow up along the trellis wires and thicken into canes. New leaves unfold. Mustard plants blossom in the vineyards between the rows and on the hills. Vineyard workers can be seen mowing and plowing the fields to cut weeds, thin and train the shoots. Wind machines, the tall towers with propellers on top, are heard throughout the region, protecting the vineyards from frost by keeping the air moving on cold nights, and preventing the coldest air from sinking to the ground where it can damage the vines.



BLOOM

Bloom announces warm weather as flowers bloom on the vines, are pollinated and the fruit is set. When the vines begin to show leaves and grape clusters begin to develop and ripen, vineyard workers sculpt the leaves of a grapevine to shade the fruit from excess sun. Vines reach into the soils to find water with growers supplementing the nourishment with irrigation. Vineyard life is in full swing with decisions made about thinning, irrigating, disking and crop level as the grapes mature in full sunshine tempered by early morning fog and late afternoon Carneros winds. Winemakers appear to inspect the crop.



VERAISON

Summer is in full swing as the grapes ripen, turn color, soften and further develop their flavors and sugars. The grapes now take on the color they will be when they are harvested. Chardonnay and other white varieties turn translucent; red wine varieties gain color. This is the critical time when growers watch the weather anxiously, waiting for the perfect harvest moment when the sugar/acid balance is just right.



HARVEST

When that perfect fall harvest moment strikes, vineyard staff work round the clock to pick the grapes, pack them into boxes, load them onto tractors and unload the grapes into de-stemmers and crushers at the wineries. Within hours of picking, the grapes are crushed and wine-making begins. Harvest in Carneros begins earlier, with grapes for sparkling wine (Chardonnay and Pinot noir) often picked in August. Depending on Mother Nature, harvest can last into November.



CLONES

Grapevines are propagated by cuttings, not seeds. Clones are the genetic heritage, the DNA, of a grape. Plants grown this way are genetically identical to the parent plant. Over time small genetic changes do occur, so that today there are many slightly different versions of all wine varieties—to become recognized as clones themselves.

VINEYARD LAYOUT

Vineyard layout is as much art as science. Rows are perhaps the most distinctive feature of a vineyard landscape. On the most basic level, rows provide the most efficient use of the land, placed just far enough apart to allow a tractor to pass. Longer rows give longer, more efficient tractor runs. Rows running up and down a slope provide better air circulation and minimize soil erosion. North-side rows allow both sides of the vine equal exposure to the sun. Planting perpendicular to the wind gives vines better protection.

TRELLISES

Trellises are the system of posts and wires that support the growth of grapevines. As canes climb the trellis wires, the leaves are exposed to the sun. Tendrils wrap around the trellis wires to help the vine grow as the grapes mature.

IRRIGATION HOSES

Irrigation hoses carry water for drip irrigation. In water-challenged Carneros soils, these hoses can be seen running horizontally among the trellises of the vines.

CORDONS

The permanent arms of the vine which produce each year's new shoots. Each year the vine is pruned back to almost the cordon, with a select number of spurs left to grow the leaves and shoots of the next vintage.

CANOPY MANAGEMENT

Canopy management allows the maximum light and air to reach the grape clusters by removing excess leaves and shoot positioning. This helps produce better color, flavor and ripeness.