

post-harvest vineyard care

Experts share their top tips for post-harvest

Planning ahead, budgeting and monitoring your vineyard are some of the most important post-harvest jobs about to kick-off after a hectic year of pest and disease pressure. With vintage nearing its end, now is the perfect time to get into your vineyard and reduce problems associated with pests, diseases and malnutrition. *Grapegrower & Winemaker* spoke to some well-known viticulturists and asked them to share their most important tips for ongoing vineyard care, post-harvest.



Mary Retallack



Prue Henschke



Ben Rose

Riverina Wine Grapes Marketing Board – Kristy Bartrop

Post-harvest care can be viewed from a five step process, according to Bartrop. She says water, fertiliser and the treatment of pests and disease is crucial when it comes to caring for your vineyard after harvest.

Post-harvest care starts with post-harvest irrigation, according to Bartrop. She says it is important to monitor the moisture levels in the soil immediately after harvest to ensure the vines don't go into shut-down mode. The next step is the application of fertiliser.

"Growers need to really look at what is the best fertiliser for their farm," she said.

"They should get a soil analysis done to know what nutrients they are lacking. This can be done for about \$30-\$100."

Treating pests and disease is the third most crucial step, particularly this year because of mildew. Bartrop recommends giving vines a good dose of sulfur.

"Many pests are still around so growers

need to take care of it now so they don't have vines shutting down with pests and diseases in the buds," Bartrop said.

Once the plant has been adequately irrigated, fertilised and treated for pests and disease, growers are encouraged to monitor the vines once a week to check the balance of growth and to prune accordingly.

"If you're absent from your vineyard, things can go astray so it's never a waste of time checking for bugs and things in the vineyard."

The Riverina Wine Grapes Marketing Board released a new reference booklet on post-harvest care for Riverina grapegrowers in March.

The Growers Guide for Riverina Vineyards outlines how to care for vineyards if they have been left unharvested, as well as useful information about post-harvest irrigation and nutrient requirements.

It also covers topics such as disease control, vineyard monitoring, pruning and the risk of disease when pruning in wet conditions.

The National Wine Grapes Industry Centre

and the NSW Department of Industry and Investment, Primary Industries contribute in the booklet, which was funded by the GWRDC Regional Grassroots Program.

Retallack Viticulture – Mary Retallack

Monitoring your vineyard couldn't be more crucial post-harvest, according to Retallack. This year's wet season has created significant challenges for growers in terms of disease.

Retallack says growers are better to target sprays next season rather than apply it post-harvest. She does however encourage growers to remove any bunch-rot fruiting bodies to reduce the bunch rot pressure next season.

"Be mindful of residual disease inoculum levels in the vineyard and aim to remove any mummified berries and infected raisins during winter pruning to reduce inoculum levels next season," Retallack said.

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leaves and root growth, Retallack recommends using a post-harvest nitrogen application to help replenish carbohydrate reserves for next season.

Having a soil analysis every five years to assess any soil amelioration that may be applied while the vines are dormant is also important.

Monitoring soil moisture and irrigating where required is also important to ensure photosynthesis and optimal leaf function are maximised until leaf fall.

Retallack also suggests that growers carry out a stocktake of what worked well this season and to identify any gaps that occurred in their vine management strategy. She recommends growers look at things like spray selection, chemical accessibility, timing, canopy management, pruning strategy and risk management strategies.

Ludvigsen Viticultural Services – Kym Ludvigsen

Ludvigsen says it's been a hard year for growers in terms of climate challenges and pests and diseases. He says it's now incredibly important that growers monitor their vineyards to stay on top of plant quality.

In a monthly email to subscribers, Ludvigsen recommends cover cropping to manage soil followed by irrigation and the application of post-harvest fertiliser through the drip system to allow vines to shut down in good condition. He says vineyard development is also important.

"Replants are worth sourcing to fill your vineyard. Gaps equal lost production, so fill the gaps," he said.

Ludvigsen also suggests making a budget.

"This is a good time of the year to plan your next season's operations. Budgets are a good starting point. What labour will you need? Write down the fungicide program and establish what chemicals you will need, for example, fungicides, insecticides and herbicides," he said.

"Planning now will save you money in the long term."

Performance Viticulture – Ben Rose

Rose's top tip for post-harvest care is for growers to reduce their stress levels and take a break from the vineyard. He says this is important because working under stress can lead to unsound decisions in the future.

"This has been the toughest season in recent history and everybody's energy levels are low, so take a break for a week or two and don't think about the vineyard, diseases, yields or the bank manager – they will still all be there when you get back," Rose said.

Rose also stresses the need to plan ahead. A starting point to this is to determine the economic viability of each block and decide what can be done to increase the performance of blocks that consistently underachieve. Like Ludvigsen, Rose also encourages growers to write a budget in time for pruning.

"Many people prune in May or June to get it out of the way, however, this incurs the cost sooner rather than later," he said.

"If you are in low frost risk area, consider pruning later in the season (August or September) so that the costs are incurred three to four months later. If you are in the position that most grapegrowers are in then this could save you thousands of dollars in interest."

The Australian Wine Research Institute – Marcel Essling

According to Essling, thorough post-harvest monitoring is important as any observations should inform future vineyard decisions.

"Monitoring will tell you of any ongoing fungal disease presence

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Ben Rose, Performance Viticulture.

and the scars of previous infection, for example bleached canes. This can indicate the effectiveness of your control strategy," he said.

Essling also recommends maintaining leaf area for as long as possible to replenish carbohydrate levels. This can be achieved through the application of nitrogen and fungal disease control. Essling also advocates cover crops, irrigation and a petiole analysis to determine what nutrients are lacking.

"Above average rainfall during the season can be positive for soil health. It's worth taking advantage of the chance to

improve soil structure through cover crops. Actions that increase soil biodiversity have numerous benefits and may reduce botrytis spore load in the following season," he said.

Henschke viticulturist Prue Henschke

Henschke viticulturist Prue Henschke's top tip for growers post-harvest is to become involved in their local region and attend post-harvest discussion groups to learn more about high disease pressure seasons. She recommends growers plan for any retrellising for better spray coverage, especially in the bunch zone, and place orders for cuttings for replanting and top-grafting with local Vine Improvement groups.

Henschke also suggests growers mow any problematic summer weeds to reduce seed build-up and spray for vine moth with *Bacillus thuringiensis* if numbers are over the threshold.

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