



New Planting Guidelines

Production Time

For those interested in plowing new ground there are several interesting opportunities. In red grapes, Lagrein (a variety indigenous to the Alto Adige region of northeastern Italy) makes a deeply colored, heavy bodied wine. St. Laurent is a variety planted in Austria that also has some promise, it's early ripening with good color and has characteristics similar to Pinot noir. Saverapi is a red grape native to the Republic of Georgia. It's a teinturier (red juiced) variety, so it's very deeply colored, but its strong aroma can be off-putting to some people. Additionally, there are countless Spanish, Italian and Slovakian varieties that have yet to be tested. There are many white varieties worthy of an effort: Sauvignon blanc, Gruner veltinger, Siegerrebe, Ehrenfelser, Early Muscat, Albarino, Arneis and others.

Some people have successfully experimented with French/American hybrids, such as Marechal Foch, Baco noir, Chambourcin, Chancellor, Vidal, Seyval and others. These hybrid varieties do make some exciting wines, but they are challenging to market. There are opportunities in these varieties for the enterprising grower and innovative winemaker.



When we distill the discussion down to economics, the only variety that comes out on top is Pinot noir. It represents 65% of the total state production value. Pinot noir receives the highest prices in the market, and it consistently ripens. It is reasonable to ask if the market can be over-saturated with Pinot noir, causing the price to drop. Certainly, it can. But Pinot noir is globally among the most coveted of wines, and it doesn't do well in very many places. Thus Pinot noir is likely to remain the most successful red variety from Oregon's Willamette Valley for many years to come. Some growers are planting other reds (particularly those varieties with consistently more color than Pinot noir) to blend into their Pinot noirs to provide color, body, aroma or flavor enhancement.

As of the end of 2011, Pinot noir represented over 62% of all wine grape acreage in Oregon (12,265 out of a total 20,300 acres). Pinot gris was second at 2707 acres, and its acreage is actually shrinking. Chardonnay was third at 942 acres. Those three varieties together represent over 78% of all acreage in Oregon. *Source: 2011 Oregon Vineyard and Winery Report.*

Question: How long does it take to bring a vineyard into production in Oregon?

Answer: In most cases it will take four to six years to bring an Oregon vineyard into full production. In year one, you plant the vines and try to establish a healthy, vigorous root system. In year two, you develop a trunk to support the fruiting canes or cordons, as well as build the carbohydrate reserves of the plant. In year three, you can fruit many vines, but yields are usually around .75 ton per acre. In year four, you can increase production to about 1.5 to 2 tons per acre. In year five, you can reach full production of 2 to 3 tons per acre.

The above is an average scenario for a dry-farmed site in the Willamette Valley. In other areas, if adequate irrigation is available, it is possible to accelerate this timeline by one year. The opposite can be true as well, if the soils are nutrient poor, or you plant in a drought season, then it can take an additional two years or more to reach full production. Vertebrate pests, mainly deer and elk, can also devastate a young vineyard by eating the foliage.

The first years of a vine and vineyard's life are very important. It is important to not over-stress the plants by over-cropping or under-watering. The vines need to be in nearly uniform growth in order to facilitate future management. Vineyards with vines in many states of development increase costs and lead to inconsistency in yields and overall quality. The adage of 'do it right the first time' is most important in vine and vineyard development.