

**Subject:** New England Grape Notes, Vol. 6, No. 10  
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## ***New England Grape Notes***

November 19, 2011, Vol. 6, No. 10



**UMass  
Extension**

**See meeting reminder at end of this message.**



### **Post-Harvest Checklist**

*Jodi Creasap-Gee, Cornell University*

After a slow, cool, wet start, the 2011 season turned hot and dry...then wet again. Luckily, growers are adaptable, and we made it through with relatively good quality fruit and a relatively cheerful industry. It is time again to review your end-of-season checklist. Applicable to both juice and wine grape production, this list may or may not be comprehensive for all vineyard businesses. Either way, I hope it is a reminder of what needs to be done.

1. If the ground is not frozen and you have not done so already, take some soil samples in the blocks throughout your vineyard. Stop in the office, and we can go through vineyard maps to create a soil sampling strategy for your vineyards.
2. **Collect, clean, and store** all bins properly, possibly under cover.
3. How much is your equipment worth to you? Vineyard equipment is expensive and essential, so take good care of it. **Clean, winterize, oil, grease, and properly store** vineyard equipment that is not to be used again until spring.
4. Grab your vineyard maps and **take a tour** (in truck – good; on Gator – better; on foot – best) of your vineyards to identify/evaluate trouble spots – damaged posts, skips, ruts between rows, broken drainage tile, etc.. [If vines need replaced, record what and where and order plants now. Grafted vines should be planned for planting 2 years in advance.]
5. If you had **weed problems** this year, you might want to try a fall application of Roundup after the leaves drop from the vines. Remember, use of several 2, 4-D formulations is illegal in the Western New York Grape growing counties, so double-check formulations and regulations prior to applications to eliminate broad-leaf weeds.
6. If you have new vineyards that are clean tilled, it is too late to get a winter cover planted, but **consider planting some grass or a cover crop** on the soil for next year to prevent erosion. The standard types of grasses used are rye, barley or oats. These are not permanent covers and, when taken down, they will enhance the fertility of your soils. Remember, the higher the organic matter in your soil, the less nitrogen you need to apply pre-bloom. You can plant a permanent cover of durable slow and low growers like creeping red fescue, especially if vine vigor is a chronic problem. It will likely be expensive.
7. **Business management:** Collect your weight tickets or whatever you use to calculate your charges. If need be, check and double-check your contracts and numbers. If there are issues related to the contract, you can either take that up with the winery or processor now or a little later. [Send itemized invoices out to the wineries with payment terms.]
8. Be sure to **record trouble spots** in each block, be it a downy mildew, powdery mildew, or phomopsis problem from this year. Losing leaves to disease only skews the leaf-to-fruit ratio, thereby making ripening more difficult in these “high yield and minimum standards” times. Being on top of sprays right out of the gate next spring will keep the vines cleaner and healthier and more productive. A healthy vine can be a productive vine.
9. Many growers are already **pruning**, are you? Is your equipment ready, and do you know who will

be pruning and what their skill level is? Pruning sets the tone for quality in 2011; we had nearly optimal bud development weather in 2010, so crop potential might be higher than average in 2011.

10. **Remove nets, bird control devices, and other items** that are in the vineyard during the growing season for winter storage.
11. **Tag vines with red leaves or white varieties with leaf curl.** These may or may not be candidates for virus – be sure to check the trunk for damage or crown gall. If the trunk is clean, tag and test the vine for the presence of virus(es). They should be pulled if they test positive for virus, or you should plan to renew trunks if tumors or injuries are present.
12. For grafted plants, hybrid or vinifera, and younger vines (<5 years old), you will need to **hill up vineyard soil with a grape hoe** or grape hoe-like device to insulate the graft unions. Recall that the graft union is essentially a weak spot – like scar tissue – that is more sensitive to cold temperatures. Sure, we had a fairly mild winter last year, but that doesn't mean Mother Nature won't surprise us this winter. Hill up 5" to 6" of dirt over the union. Other options include straw and mulch. The lighter the material, the more volume you need to protect the vine. Hilling up can be tricky, and this is where laser-planted vineyards can be very nice – the straight rows allow for relatively easy hilling up and taking down of soil. Ask someone who's experienced in hilling up, if need be, and remember that weed management needs to be spot-on, and soil conditions should be just right (not too wet or dry).
13. If applicable, talk to winemakers to **request samples of your wines**, especially the lots that are not yet blended. We had several winemakers and vineyard managers experimenting with vineyard treatments this year, so this is a prime opportunity to demonstrate how what you do in the vineyard affects what happens in the winery. Talk to the winemaker who buys your fruit and discuss the season, the fruit quality, and assess if anything needs to be done differently next year. Wine grapes bring more money because more work is required to make high quality fruit for fine wines. Your grapes represent this region – you certainly would prefer a positive perception of good quality fruit and wine, right? It's kitschy, but true: Quality starts in the vineyard, and it is essential to forge a relationship with the winemaker to whom you are selling fruit.
14. When you have the time, **sit down and review the season carefully.** This season started out warm and sunny and finished wet and cool. Figure out what worked and what didn't, and remember that if you were trying something new in your blocks, it usually takes almost 3 full seasons to see a statistically significant difference in treatments. Again, record trouble spots (disease, insects, frost pockets, etc.) and plan to manage your blocks accordingly for next year. Vine balance seemed to be a problem in some vineyards this year, although it did not prevent grapes from being harvested. Plan for this for next year. Will you leave more buds on and plan to crop thin 30 days post bloom? Or will you plan to leave fewer buds on this year? One of the keys to vineyard management is managing on a yearly basis – every year is different, so you cannot always have the same practices from year to year. How was vineyard nutrition? Did you get your soil and petiole tests completed and recommendations back? Plan for nutrient amendment applications to build up soil health. Should anything be done differently for next year for vineyard floor management? Finally, you are running a business, so assess the health of the business. Did you make money? Did you sell your entire crop? Take a long, hard look at this and determine where you can improve efficiency and profitability without cutting corners at the expense of vine health.
15. **Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!**

*(Source: Lake Erie Crop Update, 11/17/11)*

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**Researchers awarded more than \$2.5 Million for project to bring cold hardy grapes to market**  
*Tim Martinson, Michigan State Univ.*

New grape varieties can take more than 20 years to breed and evaluate, and much longer to reach commercial success. A \$2.5 million grant will help a team of researchers from Nebraska to New York tackle obstacles in vineyard, winery, tasting room, and tourism to bring cold hardy grapes to a wider

market.

The focus of the grant is a group of extremely cold-hardy wine grape varieties, new to both growers and consumers, which have spawned new small-winery industries in the upper Midwest and Northeast over the past decade.

The challenges ahead include determining the best growing conditions, how to modify their higher acidity and showcase their aroma, and how to build tourism networks to draw visitors to tasting rooms, where a majority of sales take place.

“These varieties are unique. Practices that producers use to grow and make Riesling and Merlot won't work for these varieties, due to differences in their genetic background and fruit chemistry,” said Tim Martinson, project director and senior extension associate at Cornell. “Producers of newer varieties—like Marquette, Frontenac and Brianna — face additional challenges in establishing markets to promote and sell these wines.

Their goal is to provide producers with research-based tools and practices to help them grow, vinify, and sell quality wines to local and regional markets.

“We've put together an interdisciplinary team of vineyard scientists, enologists, and marketing experts to address these challenges across 12 states,” said Martinson. “Working as a team, we hope to be able to offer integrated, relevant information that would not be possible with individual state-based teams working independently.”

The consortium includes researchers from Cornell University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, Oklahoma State University, North Dakota State University, South Dakota State University, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and the Universities of Illinois, Massachusetts (Amherst), Minnesota, Nebraska, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

[Ed. Note: UMass is thrilled to be part of this project, but it's important to know that our role (and budget) is a very small portion of the overall project. Nevertheless, the benefit of the work done will benefit our industry along with all the other states. Stay tuned.]

Ultimately, they hope the project will help convert startup wineries into sustainably profitable enterprises that can fuel rural economic development.

The grant was funded by the by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), which supports multi-institution, interdisciplinary research on crops including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and ornamentals.

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On November 29th we have two great speakers scheduled to speak at Phantom Farms in Cumberland, RI.

**Rich Cowles** from the Ct Ag Experiment Station will speak about the new pest, **spotted wing Drosophilla**. This insect hit the small fruit industry hard starting in August! We need to learn what to do in 2012.

**Alice Wise** from the Long Island Horticultural Research & Extension Center, will speak on **Viticulture Sustainability and Pest Management**.

Attached is a notice with information about the November 29th meeting as well as two other meetings scheduled for this fall.

You can register for this free meeting by emailing or contacting Margaret Siligato at URI Tel:  
874-5997 Email:  
[Siligato@uri.edu](mailto:Siligato@uri.edu)

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—Attachments:—

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Northern Grapes Project At a Glance.doc	108 KB
RMAMeetingsFall 2011.docx	89.2 KB