



REX'S PRACTICAL TIPS #14 Winter 2006

There's more to winter than pruning

It seems that every year we discover yet another element that is vital for the health and performance of our vines.

A few years ago it was Zinc and Boron for fruit set. Then it was Potassium for maturity. Lately it has been Nitrogen for aroma components in Sauvignon blanc and most recently Molybdenum for set in Merlot.

As science advances and we continue to discover the missing links in our vineyards, there is a few messages on nutrition I want you to take on board for the maximization of maturity and yield in your vineyards.

But before we go further, a wee mantra and a really easy one to remember – it's the three M's:

Measure, Modify, Maintain.

MEASURE nutrition levels and record the change.

Once you get to your ideal range, MAINTAIN the vineyard through ongoing measuring and modification.

Make applications of fertilizer to MODIFY nutrition levels to a predetermined ideal.

How often do you need a test? Initially you should get a comprehensive soil test and then every 1-2 years whilst there are problems to sort. No vineyard should go more than 3 seasons without a soil nutrition test.

Yes, you do need to know what's going on underground. Without nutrition testing any fertilizer additions you make are just guess work.

There's some very good advisors out there. Those without an affiliation to a fertilizer

company are free to recommend the most cost effective fertilizers for your property.

Make sure that once you have found a good advisor, you go back to the same advisor every year. This ensures consistent advice, built on real information and avoids kneejerk reactions.

Petiole tests give us a snap shot look at how our vines are doing in the current growing season. The result can vary according to the weather, crop load and of course any fertilizers applied in recent times especially any foliar fertilizer that has gone on in the weeks preceding the test.

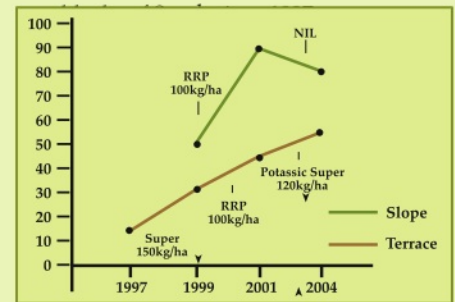
The best managers use nutrition testing (both soil and petiole) to confirm their visual diagnosis. If you really want to do this well, you will need to put effort into learning how to visually identify nutritional stress.

Be aware that nutritional disorders can exhibit themselves differently at different times of the growing season and this can be further complicated by variety and rootstock combinations. So a photo library from your property is a valuable tool for you and your advisor.

Develop the skill to identify the deficiency symptoms during the growing season. And be aware that there may be different symptoms, for the same deficiency across the fence.

Perhaps you or your advisors' most important task is to plot changes in nutritional status on a graph. This is your strongest tool for developing an understanding of the dynamics on your property.

The graph below demonstrates the soil test results and additions of phosphorus for my



Summary

1. Develop an intimate knowledge of the nutritional dynamics on your property.
 2. Use nutrition testing to confirm your observations.
 3. Photograph leaves in your vineyard to develop a library of deficiency (remember to record date, variety, rootstock, location)
 4. Graph test results and applications for each element. Modify practices if additions don't give satisfactory results
- Remember the 3M's – Measure, Modify, Maintain.

And a last word on pruning ...

In the 70's I learnt everything there was to learn about pruning at University. In the 90's Mark Nobilo patiently taught me what I should have learnt in the 70's. In the 00's I continually discover pruning refinements in the vineyard that would have been great to know in the 70's. The message... Learning to prune takes a couple of days. Learning to prune well takes a lifetime.



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