



**MISTY
VALLEY
NURSERY**

NEWSLETTER
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REX'S PRACTICAL TIPS #25

Protect your most important asset

There's some pain going on in our industry right now, particularly for Sauvignon blanc growers in Marlborough.

Take it from someone who was around during the early '80's when our industry had its first major dive, and then the early 90's when grape prices hit rock bottom. I've been around for long enough to see two major dips already and now the third.

Horticulture in New Zealand has always had highs and lows. Our industry is no exception. It will rebound, perhaps in a slightly different form.

The one key learning from previous times is to maintain your single greatest asset... your vineyard.

Whatever you do, maintain your production and quality potential so you can respond when wineries go looking for fruit. Remember, during the initial stages of the recovery, wineries on the hunt for grapes will have oodles to choose from. You will be competing for their attention, so a vineyard that has been well maintained in terms of both quality and production potential will gain their attention.

There's also another reason to maintain your asset in good production. If you need to sell, you will also be in a competitive market. The better

maintained your vineyard the more attractive and saleable it remains. Here's a few do's and don'ts based on the mistakes of previous downturns.

Pruning

Some form of pruning is essential. Unpruned vines take years to bring back into production. If you are forced into mechanical pre-pruning with a hand tidy up. Ensure that spurs are left in the right place on the head for easy conversion back to cane pruning. If you do convert your Sauvignon blanc to spur pruning in Marlborough, production will drop dramatically and powdery mildew pressure will increase, but you will decrease farm costs. Just make sure you set yourself up for quick conversion back to cane pruning.

Disease Control

It is tempting to cut out a few sprays and save some cash. This is OK as long as you cut out the right ones. Sulphur and DMI's are cheap. Sauvignon blanc is sensitive to powdery mildew. Keep your powdery programme up, as clearing powdery out of the canopy can be a nightmare. Don't go back to products like captan or chlorothalonil for botrytis control. They are weak and lack adequate persistence. Use a good botryticide and time the application correctly.

I firmly believe that good leaf plucking is your best manager of botrytis.

Weed Control

Remember the adage, 'one year's weeds is 10 years seeds'. A weedy vineyard is not only unsightly, it's more humid so

it favours disease. Weeds are very effective competitors for nutrient and water. A weedy vineyard suggests you have given up the fight. Glyphosate is cheap. Don't be swayed into using residual herbicides with their promise of long term weed control. Apart from the damage they do to the soil environment, the markets for your wine hate them.

Blanking

Vines will never be cheaper. A vine planted this year will be in full production when the recovery comes. This is the right year to start filling the gaps.

Under planting

If you are changing variety, at \$3.95 it's now much cheaper to underplant than to top graft. The success rate is always much better with underplanting and the result is always more even.

Fertiliser

Can be dropped for a season or two on most soils. But do spend a couple of hundred dollars with your independent fertilizer consultant before making this decision. Remember that timely soil applications of macro's are always cheaper than expensive proprietary tank products. If using tank fertilizers, use traditional materials like Magnesium Sulphate with a small addition of urea. You're not paying for marketing and they get the job done.

And remember Roosevelt who said,

"Drive thy business or it will drive thee."

Good luck for vintage 2009

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Call us on **0800 444 614** or contact

Rex on 027 49 80 183 rex@mistyvalley.co.nz Donna on 021 84 98 39 donna@mistyvalley.co.nz

www.mistyvalley.co.nz