



Spur Pruning It's in the Fine Detail

From time to time, I get asked to assess pruning in vineyards. I've noticed a significant increase in spur pruning in the last couple of years as growers attempt to contain vineyard expense.

Spur pruning using a pre-pruner can be a good way to contain costs if it's done well. But it will bite you on the backside 2 to 3 years down the track if some simple rules are not followed from the outset. The pictures below are all taken on 15 year old vines that have been spur pruned for 13 years. Because they have been pruned well we can't remember ever replacing a cordon in the block and production is wonderfully consistent.

Here are our rules for successful spur pruning:

1. Spacing of Spurs

Ideal spacing is an average of 200mm between spurs. This allows for sufficient space between bunches to avoid 'bunch on bunch' late season rots.

With an average of 5 spurs per metre you get a minimum of 10 shoots per metre. That might sound low but spur pruned varieties are by definition very fruitful so this spacing generally gives good crop balance for production of quality wines.



A well-spaced 13 year old cordon

2. Bud Numbers

Be very clear about the number of buds you require on each spur. Varieties sufficiently fruitful to spur prune (eg the Pinot's) should be pruned to a basal bud plus one true bud.

Any more than this will result in spur sites turning into 'castles'.



Spur site before pruning

3. Prune the Spur Site Properly

The most common cause of cordon failure is 'pin cushion' pruning. Lazy pruners snip away at the dormant canes leaving multiple viable buds at each spur site. These pin cushion sites become havens for disease, lose their fruitfulness, and are difficult to shoot thin.

Clean out all the dead material and leave only one spur with the correct number of buds.



Spur site after pruning

4. Cut the Spur Half Way Between the Last and Next Bud

By pruning the spur in the middle of the internode, you will prevent die-back taking out the top bud on the spur.

5. Avoid Downward Spurs

If you can, use only upward facing buds to establish your spurs. Downward facing spurs weaken over time and the shoots from these spurs snap off at tucking.

6. Ensure Good Quality Spur Sites

If the vines are young, take at least 2 years to establish the full length of cordon, (three years if the cordon is unilateral). This way you'll get good quality spur sites. Never attempt to establish a full cordon in one year as you will just get poor quality sites or excessive gaps between spurs. When you are laying down a cordon that will need further extension next year, make sure the last bud on the cane faces downward. The shoot that grows from this downward facing bud is much easier to tie down than a shoot from an upward facing bud.



Cordon extension technique

Think you might need vines for 2011?

Then call us now – we want to graft your preferred clone and rootstock combination.
Grafting for 2011 delivery commences 1st September 2010.