

Life in LAMORINDA

Challenging Conditions for Lamorinda Grapes

By Sophie Braccini



Photos Doug Kohen



UC Berkeley exchange student Johanna was one of the many volunteers who together harvested 1,000 lbs of Cabernet Franc, 3013 lbs of Petite Verdot, and 2412 lbs of Petite Sirah grapes at Captain Vineyards earlier this month.

As the French prepare to release their 2010 Beaujolais Nouveau on November 18th, Lamorinda winemakers are releasing their own 2010 production. But it has been a very difficult year for local vineyards and wineries.

Spring was very wet and summer never really settled in; grapes took longer to mature and develop acceptable sugar content. The wet spring seemed to foster an explosion of wildlife – raccoons and birds devastated some vineyards. Areas that stayed damp were challenged by powdery mildew, a fungus that dramatically impacted the yield.

However, producers are optimistic. The 2010 production should be unique, probably with a lower alcohol content (low sugar), but boasting great elegance and flavor. “The wines are going to be very good, well balanced and easier to drink,” says Dave Parker of Parkmon Vineyards, “people’s taste will become more refined. 2010 will be a year to remember and keep.”

“The slow ripening this year will develop a deeper flavor,” agrees Susan Captain of Captain Vineyards in Moraga, “Every year

is different, each bottle tells the story of what happened that year.” Captain says the ideal sugar level is between 22 and 24 percent. “The higher the grade the higher the alcohol level,” she says, “for me 22.5 percent is good, I’m not looking for big alcohol, I’m looking for flavor.”

Mildew was also a problem for many vineyards this year. “I should have harvested three times the grapes I ended up picking,” says Peter Cacioppo, who owns Eagle Hill Vineyards and Winery, “the powdery mildew prevention was not done enough times; we are all learning as we go.” Cacioppo has a manager who does the maintenance for him and sprays the fungicide.

Cold weather and fungus were not the only threats to grapes this year. “When talking to some of the other members, it seems that there are some common issues being faced by the growers, such as: raining/bunching of some of their crop, raccoons, birds, disappearing fruit on rows,” wrote Lafayette grower Bill Scanlin of Deer Hill Vineyards, on the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association blog.

Carol Haag of Moraga says that she lost 60%-70% of her crop to raccoons. The only way she found to get rid of them was to leave a radio on all night near the vineyard. Cacioppo has a different strategy, “I leave my two German Shepherds out at night the last three weeks before harvest, “they keep raccoons at bay,” he says.

Parker said he would not let his dog out, but that he had raccoons trapped last year and that kept the population close to his property under control. Other growers consider the raccoon problem to be so severe that they contacted the Department of Agriculture in Concord and will consider trapping them. “We live in a semi-rural environment with plenty of the natural habitat for the raccoons in between our vineyards,” says Parker, “it’s normal to see so many of them.”

“A lot of people dream of being a grower, but it is a lot of work and worry,” says Captain, “each year gives you a different story, and in the end it’s also a lot of fun.”

For more information:

Captain Vineyards: www.captainvineyards.com
 Parkmon Vineyards: www.parkmon.com
 Lamorinda Winegrower Association: www.lamorindawinegrowers.com.
 For those interested in acquiring a property with a large vineyard, Peter Cacioppo is selling his estate, www.lyndasnell.com.

Festival of Trees Moraga Royale

The Holiday season is a perfect time for giving. Moraga Royale, along with local businesses and organizations, has donated and decorated beautiful Christmas trees to support the Rescue One Foundation; a non-profit organization dedicated to the aid of the MOFD paramedics. A silent auction will be held at Moraga Royale from December 1st to the 7th. Community members are invited to join in on the holiday spirit and perhaps walk away with a wonderful Christmas tree. Viewing and bidding hours will be from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm daily. Bidding will conclude on December 7th at 9:00 PM. If you are the lucky winner of one of these trees and you reside in the Lamorinda area, we will personally deliver it to your residence the following day, December the 8th. We would love for you to join us in this fun and giving event.

Happy Holidays

If you are interested in making a donation to this event, please contact:
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