

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian

Grape Expectations & Fall la la la la

By Cynthia Brian

“Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth. There I will give thee my love.” - Song of Solomon 7:12

Growing up in the vineyards of Napa County, all our grapes had been hand picked and hauled to the winery crushers by this time of year. Our hands and feet were stained purple and on the warmest days, our special treat was a swim in the water filled grape tanks reeking of fermentation. October was the beginning of walnut season when my dad shook the trees with a self-fabricated arm attached to the Ford tractor while we children kneeled in the dirt clods tossing the falling nuts into five gallon buckets for sorting at the dehydrator barn. By the end of the month, we celebrated with a harvest hoot-enanny. Our hands were now stained green, our knees were brown, and undaunted, our feet tapped the two-step.

It's late September and my backyard grapes are just beginning to color. The Pinot Noir exhibit a blush of purple tint, but no sweetness. The berries are full, the leaves bright, yet despite recent hot days, even my table grapes, Thompson seedless, Muscat, and Rieber are not ready for consumption. The only sweet, juicy grapes dangling from my arbor are aptly named, Sweetwaters. (I'm munching on them as I write.) The vineyards where I grew up have only recently delivered Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chenin Blanc to the Napa Valley wineries. The Merlot, Zinfandel, and Cabernet Sauvignon await picking, with their sugar levels near perfect. Because of the odd weather conditions of the year, the yield is small.

Lamorinda boasts a rich grape growing precedent with a 125 year-old history. The Lamorinda Wine Growers Association (LWGA; www.LamorindaWineGrowers.com), dedicated to sustainable farming and community building, is re-establishing the area's love of the vine and wine along with our pleasant pear past. *... continued on next page*



Clusters of the 2011 crop of Pinot Noir grapes await hand picking at Captain Vineyards in Moraga



Fall colors over Monet's lily ponds at Giverny, France