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## Backyard vineyards a labor of love in Lamorinda

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The amount of wine produced varies, depending on the year's conditions. In 2014, for example, the Ledesmas produced about 48-50 bottles of wine.

According to Michele, the vineyard is carefully managed. Selvin Alvarado, who has managed the Ledesma's vineyard for the past three years, was trained by Sal Captain after Captain and his wife, Susan, decided that they could no longer manage the vineyard. The grapes are protected from critters that would love to gorge on them, from moles and gophers to raccoons. Close to harvest the grapes are enclosed in netting to protect them. Sal Captain introduced the Ledesmas to deep watering, which improves water use efficiency, and everything used on the grapes is natural. Captain came from a background as an engineer in medical devices. When he decided to go into winemaking, he applied business techniques to the process.

Captain views the process like a business project, requiring research, planning, development and risk management. Both Captain and his wife have taken classes at UC Davis, which he says is one of the most prestigious agricultural universities in the world. Now she grows the grapes and he makes the wine.

In developing his style of vineyard management, Captain says, "I noticed how many things people could do better, such as focusing on vineyard organization and orientation, planting in harmony with where the sun rises



Photo Sora O'Doherty

and sets, and maintenance of what they plant." He added, "During maintenance of a vineyard, if the plants are healthy, if the lanes are properly aligned, if that is all done right, your job is to make sure the plants get adequate water and nutrients." A key factor is keeping an eye out for diseases, such as powdery mildew.

The growing season begins at the end of January or the beginning of February with bud break and ends with harvest in late September or October. Captain talks about the many books written about the journey toward giving you the fruit at the end of the year. He has strived to apply all these principals, and to simplify many processes.

Alvarado comes twice a week and works on everything from pruning to irrigation to netting up the vines when the grapes require protection.

However, Michele Ledesma is still out in the vineyard every day to see how every vine is doing.

For more about wine making in Lamorinda, see [www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1001/Lamorinda-Now-a-Name-of-Viticultural-Significance.html](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1001/Lamorinda-Now-a-Name-of-Viticultural-Significance.html)

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