

Lindsay's Vineyard Chronicles

What's been going on in the vineyard this week?

Wednesday June 28

Mostly? More rain. But you know all about that.

Dry, sunny weather with a calm breeze during bloom is what winegrowers dream of. That type of weather keeps most fungal pathogens tamped down, and when the flowers are open it's ideal if there aren't too many spores floating around. That's because flowering is a crucial time in determining the quality of the fruit we can expect at harvest. Pathogens that take root in berries at this very early stage in their growth can throw off the course for the rest of their development and ripening.

But there's no arguing with the hand that we've been dealt this year – and we've had rain every day for more days than I can remember. The next best thing we can do at this time in the season is to ensure that the fruit zone (the area around the wire where most of our fruiting clusters will ripen) is as free from congestion and excess growth as possible. This process is referred to as 'shoot thinning', and the goal is to open the canopy so that when the rain does die down, the clusters can dry off as quickly as possible.



Figure 1: thinned canopy (left), un-thinned canopy (right), rain (everywhere)

In other news, this week we collected and sent off petioles for vegetative analysis to the lab at Penn State. Petioles are the stems attached to leaves, and the analysis of the mineral content within these stems can provide valuable information about the nutritional status of our vines. There are two times in the season that petiole analysis is recommended for grapevines: at bloom and again at veraison (when berries start to soften, turn color, and accumulate sugar). We'll compare the analysis that we receive from the lab to research standards to know if our vines are lacking in macro or micronutrients.

For each variety in each block, we collect about 50 petioles from the first full leaf across from the first flowering cluster on a shoot.

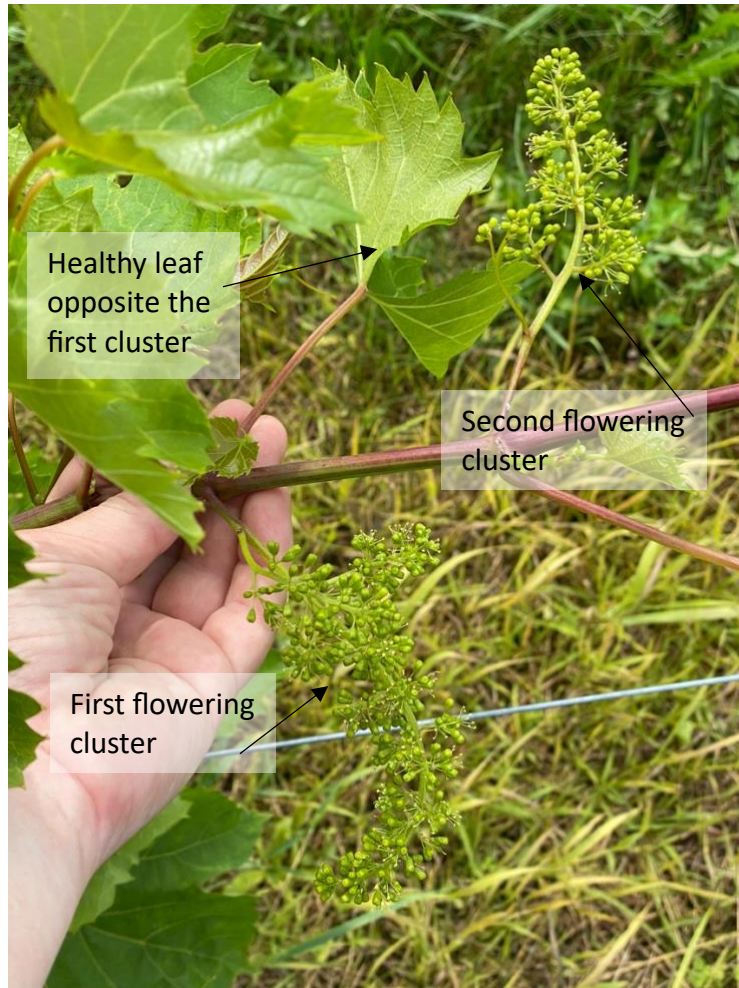


Figure 2: which leaves do we want again?



Figure 3: 50 of these to be dried, kilned, and analyzed by scientists

Since we're winemakers and not lab scientists, the next part of the process isn't terribly exciting. We fill out some paperwork, send a box to Pennsylvania, and then we wait to hear word back.

One of the great benefits of taking vegetative analysis at bloom is that, if we do find that our vines are greatly lacking in a micronutrient, we have time within this season to apply a foliar (sprayed on the leaves) fertilizer. Realistically, though, this data will better serve us in the long term. Along with the data acquired from our soil tests over the winter, we're able to see how we can improve or support our soil health so that our vines can receive all the nutrients they need to thrive.