

John's Vineyard

Towards the 2005 vintage

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After two weeks overseas I returned with trepidation. Had the dreaded mildew been kept away by the discipline, surgery and medicine administered in June and July? Emails from home had fuelled this anxiety with reports of cool days, overcast skies and periods of rain. No need to worry. Leaves were a rich green colour and young healthy grapes were in evidence on each vine (see above).

The main concern was to remove the rampant growth reaching for the skies and seeking illicit fraternisation with vines in adjacent rows. It took almost a day to trim to a density that would facilitate air circulation and sunshine penetration for a further spraying. It had been 19 days since the last spray, against the recommended 10 to 14 days stated on the bottle of 'Rose-clear 3'. Spraying on August 9th provided a chance to relax and enjoy the mid-summer warmth that prevailed for the rest of August.

Disaster and panic struck on August 19th. Drawn to inspect a patch of yellowing leaves on two of the vines, I spotted some signs of disease on the grapes themselves. Individual fruit were turning black, with some even resembling raisins (see picture). A quick look at other vines suggested the problem was localised and confined to 3 or 4 shoots that were quickly removed to prevent any spread. Panic searching of various references followed.

Was it black, grey or noble rot, or something no-one else had seen? It was unclear what it was but most references suggested that spraying with Bordeaux mixture would be appropriate for most ills. Bordeaux mixture is not available in our local garden centres so it was back to an unplanned pruning of surplus greenery and spraying of the whole vineyard with 'Rose-Clear 3' later that day. Since that time, regular inspections have revealed the occasional black grape within otherwise healthy bunches – easily removed on an individual basis.

The final week of August was warm and sunny, with the surviving grapes looking good. At the moment of writing (September 5th) a final pruning and spraying is being planned. Fingers crossed for a warm and sunny ripening season. Will the grapes develop the necessary sweetness to make wine?

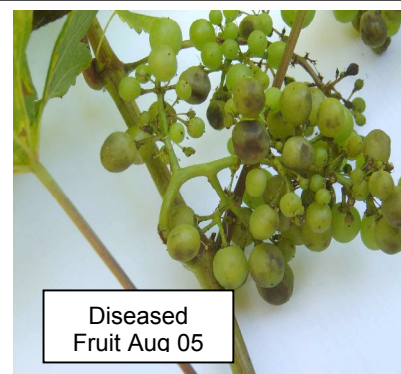
They told him that it couldn't be done

Australian and New Zealand friends scoffed at the idea that the Poms could grow vines for wine, ignoring the 100 or so vineyards across the UK. So as a complete novice in 2000 I took up the challenge - in my small back garden in Somerset. There were some favourable factors:

- * limestone based soil;
- * a 30 foot high south-facing white stone wall, providing shelter from north winds and a sun-trap;
- * alleged global warming;
- * Chardonnay flourishes in Champagne, northern France.

Twenty two tiny vines (Chardonnay - Colmar 57 - S04 grafted on American rootstock) were planted in April 2000. After 4 trial growths, 2005 is the year for the big test. Follow progress in this Monthly Newsletter. See how I finish this traditional rhyme:-

*They told him that it couldn't be done,
And with heart he set right to it. He tackled the job that couldn't be done,
And (could / couldn't) do it.
John Stephenson*



Diseased Fruit Aug 05