

John's Vineyard

Towards the 2005 vintage

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The Final Leg

September weather was mixed, with periods of coolness and damp interspersed with warmth and sunshine – typical British conditions. A final spray was administered on September 17th in the hope of stemming the march of the black spots reported in August. So far so good, as can be seen in the above shot taken on October 4th. A few individual grapes resemble raisins and can be easily removed. By October 1st all green growth appeared to have ceased. Spurs were wooden, breaking easily, leaves displayed autumn features of brown and gold and some had already started to fall.

In anticipation of a harvest in the final week of October, and of predatory pigeons, blackbirds, robins and tits (all frequent visitors) attracted by the growing sweetness of the grapes, netting was draped over the whole vineyard (see above). Like all aspects of viticulture implemented in John's vineyard this year, the net cover was improvised, using remains of earlier fruit and vegetable activity. It took two days, with a few gaps still resisting my ingenuity. Next year I will plan the net cover at the outset.

There is still concern about the overall health of the vines. As can be seen in the picture (right) white growth is evident on the underside of many of those leaves most advanced in Autumn colours. I am not experienced enough to know exactly what this is, but it looks suspiciously like a variation of the dreaded mildew.

The main concern, however, is that the grapes develop sufficient sweetness to enable a decent wine to be made. This week the temperature has been in the 70sF and dry is forecast for the next 3 days so the portents are good. But what about October weeks a two and three? All will be revealed in the final newsletter in 3 weeks time.

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



White growth on underside of leaf