

Mark Miner's Vineyard Report 11-27-20

Hi all, hope everybody had a good TG!

Having a big pruning event 12/6 (Sunday after TG weekend) at Bancroft; good opportunity for anyone who wants to learn pruning and take-home grape-cuttings.

I've put in two days on the CACG vines removing leaves, laterals and tendrils, plus combing out all the tangled canes, and am ready to do actual PRUNING on Saturday, tomorrow, 11/28. We will also bag cuttings for January distribution at Bancroft. Of course, anyone who wants to help is welcome. Vineyard area is currently an awful mess of leaves and canes, but should look very spruce and tidy by the end of Saturday.

Vineyard and hoop-houses present an ongoing series of interesting challenges; each year I make adjustments, cross my fingers, and come closer to achieving my ideals of productivity.

One idea hit me with the force of a ton of bricks this afternoon: The trellis needs to be extended 2' UP, and the cordons (and fruit-zone) need to be placed UP HIGHER on the trellis.

WHY?

- #1 The rabbits are tearing open the bags and eating the grapes in the 2'-3' fruiting zone. EVERY YEAR they do this, and it's kind of getting to be frustrating. HARUMPH! ;(
- #2 The land rises towards the children's center, but the trellis is level. Eventually, the trellis for the new grapes is about 2' lower into the ground than the trellis by the big gate.
- #3 The pine-tree and solar panels are poaching the sunlight from the grapes down that way as well, sunlight that the grapes need to stay disease-free and productive of sweet grapes.

To resolve all these issues, I would like to add vertical extensions to the existing trellis so as to have 2 additional wires at 7' and 8'. This would require eight pieces of 8' rebar, tied with wire onto the existing uprights, and some 200' of additional galvanized wire.

My inclination has always been to put the cordons LOW at 3' and train the vines to grow UP, what they call "Vertical Shoot Positioning." Most vines are naturally disposed to grow UPWARD towards the light. But there are alternatives, especially for trailing vines like Concord that like to flop downward. There is a pruning style called TOP WIRE CORDON, which puts the arms (permanent or annual) at the TOP of the trellis, so that the fruiting zone is well away from the rabbits. This seems like the easiest way to deal with the constant rabbit damage. The vines won't like it -- they want to grow up! -- but I can gently bend them around and tie them down, and they'll be fine.

I will put the cordons on the 6' wire, above the rabbit-zone, but with room to tie the canes both above and below. Putting the fruiting zone at 6'-7' would be a rabbit-proof, workable (albeit somewhat awkward) height for tall vineyard workers like me. Others might need to stand on a milk-crate.

My budget for trellis extension is about \$40-\$50. A low-cost fix for a number of problems. I can cover that myself, if the project is acceptable to CACG. I will tie the cordons to the 6' wire in any case on Saturday. I think it would look awkward to only extend down by the pine-tree; better to have the extension run the full length of the trellis.

Reference: Double A on pruning to Top Wire Cordon:

<https://doublevineyards.com/index.php/downloads/dl/file/id/84/product/0/topwirecordon.pdf>

The so-called "Geneva Double Curtain" used for Concord grapes on the East Coast, showing cordons on the top wire, and canes hanging straight down, in accordance with Concord's trailing habit.

Run-down on Grape varieties:

Seneca grafted onto Triumph has done EXTREMELY well, putting out lots of well-branched canes in both directions; looking forward to full crop of white grapes with spicy white gumdrop flavor in 2021. This vine is notorious for needing LONG CANE pruning to achieve a good crop.

Current plan is to hack back Delicatessen to stumps and graft it over to seedless "lunchbox grapes" that will be of wide general appeal, like Neptune, Jupiter, and Reliance. I am open to other suggestions.

(Neptune is yellow, crunchy, and has the pure isoamyl acetate flavor of pears/"banana oil."

Jupiter is blue and has a nice lychee/muscat flavor.

Jupiter is a priority, as CACG has no other MUSCAT flavored grapes.

Reliance is pink, and has a very charming fruity flavor.)

I am very fond of Delicatessen, and have really enjoyed its healthy leaves, purple canes, and strong raspberry flavor over the last few years. But, being a seeded wine-grape, as the vineyard matures, it must give place to grapes that EVERYBODY will like. So, sadly, we say good-bye to Delicatessen in 2021. ;(

With Delicatessen out of action in 2021, Wapanuka and Seneca will have a chance to use that space.

I was going to take out Wapanuka, as being a small-growing grape, but Golden Champion is taking up the space of two vines, so instead I will cut back Golden Champion somewhat to make more room for Wapanuka. We should be able to fit six vines in the 70' space available.

Golden Champion was bred in the UK as a high-end hot-house exhibition grape for expert growers; I am still learning its quirks. With pollination, bagging, and perhaps an antifungal dip, it is capable of producing gorgeous bunches of ENORMOUS golden grapes, especially since it is grafted to a MONSTER-vigorous rootstock. The production this year of a large number of long canes indicates that the vine is now completely mature and ready to produce a full crop.

Joy is a young vine, but ready to produce a few clusters in 2021. I hope it does not become unmanageably huge, which I have seen it to at Northminster.

Everest has produced enough trunk to reach a 6' top wire cordon. We may see 1-2 clusters in 2021, no promises! The Everest berries I had at Bancroft this year fully justified Cornell's high opinion of this new release. Unfortunately the trunk has a 330 degree kink. (!) I think it'll be fine though.

With the grapes under control, I'll be able to turn my attention to the passionfruit and blackberry hoop-house. I give myself a C grade for them as they now stand. More work needed to get them up to the A level. Current plan for spring replanting is to go almost entirely with OSAGE blackberry, as that one variety has shown itself to be extremely rugged, productive, and flavorful. It tops out at about 10', no super-long canes, so it's well-adapted to the hoop-house. So, 9 Osage and 1 Wild Treasure in 2021.

Passionfruit needs a half-dozen more vines next year, and a ready hand on the *Bacillus thuringiensis*!

Flaming Fall color on blueberry foliage is spectacular. No pruning needed; the 4' long "whips" are productive of berries for 3 years and get cut out in their fourth year. Will let CACG know when I have a date for FEBRUARY Blueberry potting event.

---Mark