

THE 2012 SEASON

What a year! It was clearly the best crop since 2007. The fruit we picked was beautiful and plentiful.

Winter 2011-2012 was about as normal as we could expect. Temperatures were about normal. We had a nice Spring rain in March with enough rain in April to delay our irrigation until June. We applied organic Stylet Oil as our first spray in mid-April and the Roundup went on in mid-May. We are not organic farmers but we use minimal chemicals, mostly a systemic weed control (Roundup) and sulfur.

The vineyards were pruned in early February. The vines were taken back to two buds in order to control the number of shoots and amount of fruit we would have this year. The goal is to always farm for quality. Bud break on the Sangiovese came in mid-March, but a cold spell caused the later varieties to bud out in April, two weeks later than normal (what is normal in farming?)

The 2012 season started out late and cold but we easily got past the worrisome time when frost may damage the young shoots. We were timely with vineyard management and the vines had been shoot-thinned, wires moved, and shoots positioned by mid-May. The weather remained cool throughout the Spring and flowering finally arrived in late May. Bloom continued until mid-June and we were fortunate because just as bloom had finished we had three very hot days with the temperature reaching 107 F. If this had occurred during bloom we would have suffered shatter which is the drying up of the pollen needed to fertilize the fruit. Nevertheless, we did suffer some sunburn on the fruit, particularly the Syrah, which made harvest a bit challenging.

The remainder of the Summer was unusually cool and veraison, the time when the grapes soften and turn from green to their final color, occurred in early to mid-August, later than normal. The unusually cool Summer continued, delaying harvest to two weeks later than normal. Sauvignon Blanc was harvested the first week of September and our major varieties did not touch our target until the last week of September. Harvest was really an October event this year, during the time we should have been finished with fermenting and be laying down the wine for aging. We were blessed because a significant amount of rain in early October was followed by a 2 week Indian Summer that dried out the bunches and helped us get most of the remaining fruit ripe for harvest.

It has been said many times that in farming nothing is predictable and we are always learning. That has proved true once again. The 2011 growing season was horrendous with major heat spikes causing sunburn and drying up much of the fruit. It made us wish in hindsight that we had not removed so many leaves that shade the fruit. Here in the 2012 season we had a bountiful crop (thanks in part to the plentiful sun the prior year on the next year's buds) but the Summer was unusually cool, seldom reaching 90 degrees F. The cool weather and the plentiful crop taxed the energy of the vines and delayed the harvest well into the Fall season. We picked some fruit earlier than I wish, not having foresight of the extended Indian Summer. Once again we can exercise hindsight, this time wishing we had dropped more fruit early in the Summer. But the bottom line is that it was a very good year, and the fruit was so plentiful I got to make a lot of wine myself with the fruit that was left over after meeting our customers' wishes.

This coming year? Another adventure. I sure wish for a return to normal. But, then again, what is normal in farming? This year promises to be another substantial crop of fine fruit. Some of our grapes are sold to wineries but we try to hold most of our fruit for home winemakers. I know how difficult it is to find top quality grapes in relatively small quantities. Many quality wines have been made from Bennett Ridge grapes. Check out our awards page to see how we have done as everything listed there was made from our own grapes. We look forward to our past customers returning this Fall to another bountiful harvest of quality fruit, and will always welcome new customers to the fold.