



The Grape Harvest Is Here! Are You Ready To Improve This Year's Vintage?

It is definitely time to start planning ahead! Be sure you are ready and organized to do the work you need to do in order to protect, complete and improve this year's vintage going forward.

Press reds as soon as they are done or protect from oxidation if you want to use extended maceration (and then press after that). If you have not inoculated with bacteria for malolactic fermentation (MLF) already, do that in the newly pressed red wine. We have package sizes for 6 gallons or 66 gallons. Keep the wine warm during MLF, preferably above 65° F (18° C). Do not add sulfites until MLF is complete, then rack the wine and add sulfite according to p. 13 in The Beverage People Wine & Cider Harvest Newsletter depending on the wine's pH.

Or don't do MLF. Particularly if you want a bright, young-drinking red wine in the style of some Italian light-bodied reds, you may want to skip MLF. While white wines can usually be protected from unintentional MLF with sulfite and cool temperatures, reds seem to have a mind of their own and may head in that direction whether you want them to or not. To actively prevent the secondary fermentation, treat with lysozyme or Bactiless. After lysozyme, you may want to fine with bentonite, to avoid a future protein haze. Keep your sulfite program up and keep the wine cool, preferably below 55° F (13° C).

If you are considering MLF on a white wine, it is probably Chardonnay or maybe Sauvignon Blanc. You may be considering barrel aging to make an oaky Chardonnay or Fumé style Sauvignon. The same conditions apply as for red wine; keep the wine warm and don't add more sulfites until MLF is complete. If you want just a partial MLF, you can use lysozyme followed by bentonite to stop the fermentation and to remove protein residue. However you go about it, when MLF is over or has been skipped, keep the wine cool and sulfited for winter storage. During the cold winter months, you will have several opportunities to stabilize your white wine against later crystallization of tartrates (potassium acid tartrate, cream of tartar). If not stabilized in bulk, the wine in bottles later may produce crystals when chilled. While non-toxic and generally harmless, the crystals put off some wine drinkers because they look like tiny bits of broken glass. To stabilize in bulk, watch the weather reports. Then, when a cold snap of below-freezing temperatures is at hand, expose the wine to nighttime cold for several days to a week. Either open the cellar doors at night or move the containers outside. If your local temperatures drop well below freezing, take care to avoid actually freezing wine in a glass carboy—you want to avoid breakage (PET carboys and stainless steel tanks are fine). Insulate the wine or close up the cellar during the daytime to try to keep it near freezing for at least several days. Common refrigerator temperatures are about

35° to 40° F (1.6° to 4.4° C), so bulk storage for a while below that threshold should protect the wine against later precipitation.

For red or white wine storage, the best sulfite protection is maintained if you monitor the level at least once every few weeks. You can test with a [Vinmetrica meter](#), or bring in a sample for us to send over to Signature Wine Lab for you. And one more observation about barrel storage: red to white is fine, but white to red is not. That is, you can make that oaky Chardonnay or barrel-aged Fumé Blanc for a vintage or two, then move your barrel over to your “red program” and age Pinot Noir, Cabernet, or any other red in it with no negative effects. Trying to move a barrel previously used for reds to a “white program” is much riskier. It is likely that the white wine will pick up some residual color from the used red barrel.

With the wine sleeping in the cellar for the winter, here’s a short list of **The Beverage People’s wine aging principles** to bear in mind:

Cool storage is best (about 55° F, 13° C)

But, steady is more important than the absolute temperature. A small drift, like 68° to 72° F (20° to 22° C) is better than wide swings like 45° to 60° F (7° to 16° C).

Keep fermentation locks or breather bungs on containers. Solid bungs may pop out if there is a bit of residual fermentation or a sudden temperature rise.

The wine will use up a lot of free sulfur dioxide at first, but it will stabilize after a couple of months and you will probably be able to add smaller amounts to maintain your target level. (Refer to the [Wine and Cider Harvest Newsletter](#), page 12 about Scheduling Sulfite Additions.)

Top up barrels at least once a month. If you didn’t save enough topping wine, use clean, well-made commercial wine of a compatible variety. Just pop the cork and pour it in; you’ll get it back when you bottle! (Carboys do not need topping up, but keep them full to the bottom of the neck.)

Rack your wine two to four times between fermentation and bottling. Don’t get greedy—it’s better to leave the lees behind and lose a little wine than drag them with you and wind up with sediment in the bottles.

Taste the wine every time you open the storage container to top up, add sulfite, or rack. You will learn about its evolving character and you may be able to intervene promptly if an off-aroma or flavor shows up.

Take notes! You are going to do this again next year, right? This party may be over, but there is always another harvest waiting around the corner...

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