



How to Plan a Commercial Vineyard

Before planting a vineyard on a new site a number of questions must be addressed

1. Will the new vineyard be economically viable
2. Is the Climate suitable for grapes and the wine variety selected?
3. Will the soil support a healthy vineyard?
**Vines do not like wet feet during the growing season
4. Is there adequate, high quality water for irrigation if necessary?
5. Were previous crops successful on this site?
6. Are there any biological problems present?
7. Will you be processing grapes on site or transporting the grapes to another winery destination? How far is the future destination?
8. How will you sell or market the grapes or wine? Do you have a pre-plant contract? What are the costs and what is your contract price, if you have one?
9. Do you have the capital for this investment as you will not reach peak production for 5 or more years
10. What is your labor force? Will you try to perform tasks mechanically?
11. Will your vineyard have a theme? Italian, Rhône, California Style

Economic Considerations

The most important part of planning a vineyard is determining whether the project will economically viable. Market potential must be explored before planting grapes to determine where they can or will be sold. The variety selected must be desired by wineries and or consumers. Can you create a wine that can compete with other wine growing regions in a price range where you can make a profit? (i.e. You might like Cabernet Sauvignon but if you have to charge \$20 to make a profit and its quality is matched to a \$12 bottle from Napa Valley, it is not likely going to work). To gain some insight on market trends, consult some trade publications such as *Wines and Vines*, *Practical Winery & Management*, *Wine Spectator* and *Grape Grower* magazines.

In addition, you should join the [Placer County Wine and Grape Association](#) where you can speak with other local growers and wineries in the area. You may also wish to contact the University of California Cooperative Extension and local farm Advisor.

Summary of Vineyard Development Steps

The checklist below should be followed starting a year or more before planting a vineyard

1. Determine market outlook and winery demand and plant appropriate varieties
2. By means of backhoe pits, determine physical and chemical suitability of soil for grape production. Determine soil fertility and vigor potential. Determine amendments needed.
3. Determine future water needs. Find water and provide adequate storage pond or tank. Determine water quality.
4. Take root and soil samples for nematodes.
5. Check native vegetation for death or poor growth, nutritional deficiencies and oak root fungus.
6. Clear and level land
7. Amend soils and rip or deep plow according to soil specialists recommendations (August)
8. Level site and control perennial weeds
9. Survey vineyard site and lay out primary bench marks
10. Make a scale drawing of the proposed new vineyard, including:
 - a. Direction of rows
 - b. Trellis system, row and vine spacing
 - c. Row length (allow for turning radius of equipment)
 - d. Picking avenues and roadways
 - e. Irrigation and delivery systems
 - f. Drainage system if needed
 - g. Loading areas for trucks and Gondolas
11. Determine and order vines from nursery. This should be done after the soil properties and potential site vigor is completed by the soil specialist. On a large scale, vines need to be ordered at least 1 year in advance. On smaller orders some nurseries will have some vines on hand, Custom orders of lesser available varieties need to be ordered well in advance. Likewise decide how you want to plant, green-pot plants, bench grafts, dormant etc...
12. Install drainage
13. Layout primary vineyard blocks, install irrigation
14. Install erosion control and seed cover
15. Install deer/rabbit fence
16. Layout and mark entire vineyard. Install trellis system. This can be done after planting but it is not recommended
17. Plant in spring after the threat of frost.

Overview

If you are new to grape growing obtain good counsel before planting or consider using a private consultant for the more technical aspects of the project. Join your local grape growers association, the [Placer County Wine and Grape Association](#) to consult with others already familiar with the process.

