



GROWING GRAPES IN PLACER & NEVADA COUNTIES

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Placer and Nevada counties have a young, rapidly growing wine industry, composed of small vineyards and more than twenty small wineries. We are foothill counties and most of the grapes are grown at elevations between 1000 and 2500 feet. Most production is red, and we are able to produce some fine quality grapes because of our warm days and cool nights. We grow a wide range of varieties, including many lesser-known varieties that are in demand for blending. Contrary to many areas, the average prices paid for our grapes are actually increasing.

If you are interested in commercial production, i.e. selling your grapes, look at acreage and crush reports at [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics by State/California/Publications/Grape Crush/Final/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics%20by%20State/California/Publications/Grape%20Crush/Final/index.asp). They provide information on varieties grown in the area and prices paid for each variety. Acreage reports are by county (Tables 9 & 10), and crush reports by district, we are in district 10.

Because of overplanting of grapes, if you want to sell your grapes, you should establish a relationship with a winery before you plant anything. Without a contract, selling grapes may be difficult. Cost of production studies are at <http://coststudies.ucdavis.edu/>

A major drawback in Placer/Nevada is the very limited agricultural labor pool. Growers who really need labor seem to find it, but the skill levels may vary. Many growers do vineyard maintenance themselves and look for contracts that include harvest and transport to the winery.

Grapes can grow on fairly infertile ground, and that may be preferable for quality. Foothill soils are frequently shallow and may have dense impermeable layers called hardpans, which require extensive land preparation. Most are either clay or decomposed granite and fairly acidic. At lower elevations, there are some neutral or slightly alkaline soils.

Soil testing

UC Cooperative Extension does not do soil testing. You do need to have your soil tested. Area labs include A & L Western Agricultural Labs, Inc. <http://www.al-labs-west.com/>, (209) 529-4080; Fruit Growers' Lab <http://www.fglinc.com/>, (530) 343-5818; Sunland Lab <http://sunland-analytical.com/>, (916) 852-8557. California labs will be able to provide the most accurate and appropriate information.

If you have different soil zones, you will need to take several samples and have them tested separately. You will need a basic panel of tests to find out pH and soil nutrient status. A pH of 6.5 is desirable. You also need to know CEC, ppm Ca, Mg, K, Na (base saturation %), pH, and Ca:Mg ratio. If you inform the lab that you want to grow winegrapes, they can give you appropriate fertilizer recommendations.

Your County Resource Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Placer County

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Nevada County



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Service can provide information about your soil type, texture, depth, and waterholding capacity, as well as assistance with irrigation and soil conservation practices. Both are listed in the phone book under US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Find out how deep your soil is and whether or not you have a hard pan, which you can only do by digging deep (6-8 ft) holes and looking at what is there. Before putting in a vineyard, you need to do extensive land preparation, especially on heavy clay. Most grape experts consider neglecting initial soil preparation to be "penny wise and pound foolish". In other words, your vineyard and grape quality will suffer in the long run. You need to give your vines the best possible opportunity to establish a good root system to avoid future water and nutrient issues.

Once your soil is prepared, consider establishing cover crops in order to facilitate rainy season work in the vineyard. If you need to alter soil conditions such as pH, do it before planting. Add amendments before ripping or slip plowing so as to incorporate them.

Networking & Education

Get involved with one of the local grapegrower associations:

Sierra Wine & Grape Growers Association

www.sierragrapegrowers.org

Placer County Wine & Grape Association <http://pcwga.org/>

They have speakers at their

monthly meetings, which can be very helpful in getting started. You also may be interested in the quarterly course taught at UC Davis on various aspects of vineyard management. More information and registration is available at <http://ucanr.org/ucdexvit>. Useful publications are at <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/>.

Varieties & rootstocks

The UC Integrated Viticulture website, <http://iv.ucdavis.edu/> provides extensive information on grape varieties and rootstocks. *Wine Grape Varieties in California*, UC ANR Publication 3419, has detailed rootstock and scion information. This book is available for sale at UCCE offices in Grass Valley and Auburn. There is also a list of resources in on the Foothill Farming website at <http://ucanr.org/sites/placernevadasmallfarms/>.

Red wine varieties - Barbera, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carignane, Grenache, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Sangiovese, Syrah, Tempranillo, Zinfandel, among others.

White wine varieties - Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Semillon, Chardonnay, French Colombard, Orange Muscat.

Commonly used rootstocks include 110R, 3309, 5C, 101-3C, Saint George, 140Ru, and 1103P. Rootstock choice depends on your soil depth, fertility and water situation. Some people use cuttings ("own-rooted"), but this is not a recommended practice.

There is good reason to use grafted vines. Rootstocks confer a number of properties such as vigor control, pest resistance, tolerance to water stress, etc. We do have *Phylloxera* insect pests in this area and they will kill an own-rooted vineyard. It is also recommended that you use certified planting material to be sure it is "clean", that is, free of known viruses and pests. Use the FPMS list of nurseries at <http://fpms.ucdavis.edu/Grape/CDFAGrapeProgram.html>

Pick several varieties you are interested in, contact a nursery and tell them where your land is, about your soil analysis, soil type and depth and ask for recommendations. Also talk to growers in your area.

Quarantines

There are internal quarantines in California for certain pests so your vines must be inspected by the County Ag Department before they are planted. Do not depend on the nursery to know about quarantines. You are responsible for legally importing your vines. Follow the guidelines as vines can be destroyed by the Ag Commissioner's staff if they do not meet quarantine criteria.

Good luck with your new vineyard!

