

TENDRILS

with vineyard consultant
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Methods vary for training young vines in their first and second years in the ground. In the north, it is more common for a vine to be supported by a string to the top of the post (at about 1.8m) and grown straight up, with laterals taken out during the year. In the second year this is untied and 10 to 20 buds laid along the fruiting wire, usually between 800mm and 1.2m above the ground.

In southern regions, where growth is not as extensive, it is common for the first year's growth, usually about 1 metre of cane, to be trained up a stake. It is then cut back to a hand-span under the fruiting wire. As it comes away in the spring, two shoots are selected and trained each way along the wire, 10 to 20 buds laid at the second pruning.

I'm not saying one method is better than another. Soil, geography and climate all influence the decision on what is the best method. However, I constantly see people laying too much wood in the second and third year with the result that the vines are put under too much stress at a time when they're still trying to expand their root systems. The vines will really suffer the following year and be more likely to have either the same amount of fruit or less.

Vines need to be developed in a systematic way. Limit the fruiting in the first cropping year to about 1.5 to 2kg per vine and manage them with fruit and shoot thinning. We don't want the vines to shut down and stop growing. We need to keep them growing with green foliage so that the roots can continue to expand. This yield can be increased the following year by another 1.5 to 2kg until they reach their target yield. This is a better method than "going for broke". You may get 10 tonnes the first fruiting year but only five the following year because the vines are under stress and more susceptible to disease. It's better to have five tonnes the first fruiting year and 10 tonnes the second.

Make sure you've planned the yield for your vines and stick to it.

Look at what other growers have done and talk to a consultant. Whatever you do, don't overstress the vines in their first few years. It will only cause problems.

A vineyard should be there for 50 years. Why take the risk?