

SAVING THOSE YOUNG VINES

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Over the next few weeks, it is inevitable that in many wine growing regions of New Zealand, the real impact of El Nino will kick in. High daily temperatures will coincide with a lack of rainfall, meaning anyone who has planted new vines in the past six months will be under pressure to keep them alive.

If you have gone to the trouble of investing in vines as either replants or to establish a new vineyard block – then the last thing you want is for those vines to turn up their toes due to a lack of water. While you can't bring the rain on, you can take a few simple measures to protect the plants, as Nick Hoskins from Riversun Nurseries explained to me.

While all young vines are at risk at this time of the year, there are two very separate scenarios. Firstly for those that have removed diseased vines and replanted – be

aware that those young vines are having to compete with the more mature vines living alongside.

Hoskins says the biggest issue here is the differing needs between the two.

“Generally the water requirements for young vines are higher than what is required for mature vines. The young vines require more frequent watering, whereas the mature vines which have a bigger root system, tend to get infrequent irrigation.”

If the irrigation system is left unchanged, the young vines will suffer he says. But there are ways around that.

“Depending on what type of dripper line you have, you can place extra drippers around the new vines so it gets more moisture.”

Mulch the replacement vines with any form of protection you can come across.

“It doesn't necessarily have to be organic mulch. I have seen people use filter pads, or plastic and weed matting. Any of those things are worth while. If it is thick enough it will stop the moisture evaporating away from the ground and retain it near the surface which is where the young vine's roots are.”

One form of mulch you may not have considered, but one that Hoskins has trialled himself, is crushed sheep dags.

“They work really well. We used them in our nursery at Riversun one year, just put them along the rows and it made a hell of a difference.

Ensure there are no weeds competing with the replanted vines, but be very careful if spraying for weeds. Young tips are extremely vulnerable.

Take a leaf out of Gisborne's books and consider hand watering

the replanted vines. If you are in the situation that water rights have been turned off (as is extremely likely in parts of Marlborough) this may be the only option you have left.

“They have been doing this in Gisborne for years, because vineyards are often established without irrigation and the young vines, are just hand watered. It used to be standard practice, two guys with hand guns and another driving a tanker.

“I am unsure what the cost of driving around hand watering is, but maybe it's something you have to consider. To me, if you have gone to the trouble of investing say \$5 for a new vine, and another \$1.50 to plant and stake it, you might as well look after it.”

In terms of new vineyard blocks, there aren't the issues of competition between the new and old vines. But many of the other issues remain the same Hoskins says.

Protect the vines against weeds. Mulch the vines wherever possible, with straw, bark, side thrown grass, or plastics, cardboard, wool or filter pads. Anything that will help prevent evaporation.

If you have taken advantage of the weeks leading up to now, to get as much moisture onto the vines as possible, you may now be facing another issue if irrigation is turned off.

“Because when you do shut the water off you have a pretty dependent and soft vine and they can shut down. I saw that last



There are numerous tracts of new vineyard in Marlborough – how will they cope with the next two months of a dry summer?

year when someone had pushed his vines so quickly, that the root system couldn't keep enough water up to the canopy and consequently parts of it were shutting down. The vine was out of balance, with a small root system not able to take up enough moisture to support a large vigorous canopy.” That balance is vital in all vines, but even more so in the young, Hoskins says.

“Moisture is evaporating through the leaves, so you need to have big roots to replace that. If it can't keep up, some of that canopy will begin to die off.

If you do have a big canopy (and can't irrigate) you could reduce the leaf area to help keep those vines alive. Or again you could take note of Gisborne and hand water. To me it would be certainly worth doing.”

He says even with a big dry, it is unlikely you will lose all the vines – remember they aren't called a weed for nothing.

“They would be unlikely to die outright, but you might end up with some gaps, where a few die off.”

He advises that you need to assess those young vines at the end of the season.

Water as much as possible lead-

ing into winter to rebuild carbohydrate levels and make careful consideration about how you proceed over winter.

“You have to assess those vines at the end of the season. The worst thing you can do for a vine that is not fully developed, is end up laying more cane to fruit it. You might have to readjust your thinking about when you get that vine into production.” ■



Another use from those sheep in vineyards could be crushed dags, which can help as a mulch for new vines.

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