Management of Young Vines: A Personal Perspective

KYM LUDVIGSEN
Southcorp Wines, Great Western, Victoria

1. Planting
Time is important. Success, measured by vine growth, can be poor if vines are planted late. Vines planted in August/September will produce the maximum growth. Forget planting after November. Important to plant own-rooted vines deep. Leave only 1 or 2 buds above the soil level. Try to face the buds along damp. Root pruning should be kept to a minimum. Leave as many roots as you believe you can handle, but at least 20 cm. Trim tops to about 2 to 5 buds.

2. Weed control
Plant into a weed-free vine row. Treflan – apply pre-planting and incorporate. Surflan – post-planting, needs to be watered in to incorporate. Devrinol – post-planting, needs to be watered in to incorporate. Consult labels for application method, water rate and suitability for young vines. Weeds around damp. Root pruning should be kept to a minimum. Leave as many roots as you believe you can handle, but at least 20 cm. Trim tops to about 2 to 5 buds.

2. Water and nutrition
Irrigation should be in place within days of planting. The later planting occurs the more important this is. Frequent, small water applications are the best. Minimum of 1 watering per week. Don’t over-water. Check the soil regularly with a shovel. Aim to keep the vine healthy and growing as long as possible. Nitrogen applications of approximately 30 g urea/month are advised. Not sure it is a good move to deep place fertilizers pre-planting. It may take the vine too long to access. Nitrogen applications of approximately 30 g urea/month are advised. Not sure it is a good move to deep place fertilizers pre-planting. It may take the vine too long to access.

4. Vine training
At least 3 passes will be necessary. First pass occurs October – November. Rule 1 – take the string to the vine, not the vine to the string. Rule 2 – take the longest and the strongest shoot. This pass takes the longest time. 1 person covers approx. 0.23 ha/day. Second pass occurs November – December. Involves establishing cordons and lateral removal. Rule 3 – wrap 4 arms to the wire. This gives more choices at winter pruning. 1 person covers approx. 0.5 ha/day. Third pass occurs January. Involves lateral removal on trunk and cordon wrapping. Pinch out tips when cordons touch. This encourages lateral development along the cordon. 1 person covers 0.5 ha/day.

5. Pruning
Rule 4. Always cut through the node when pruning. This ensures the strings stay attached to the vine. Rule 5. Ensure the wood chosen is at least pencil thickness, of good colour, with an even distribution of buds down the shoot. Rule 6. Get all the vines to the wire in the one year. I believe it best to allow the vines to sprawl in the year of planting. Train to the wire and establish the cordon in year 2. Drop the crop in year 2. Prune to short cordons for further wrapping in year 3. Promotes even budburst. Expect 30% of full crop in year 3.

6. Pest and diseases
Expect cutworms, black beetles, beetles or worse in year 1. Expect powdery and downy mildews as main diseases. Insecticides and fungicides should be withheld until a need is apparent. If you use a protective spray program copper oxychloride, and wettable sulphur are adequate. Animals – main problems. Rabbits and hares – don’t need expensive chemicals, just something that is unpalatable to the animal. Birds – the best cure is the permanent cure. However permits are necessary for a range of birds that cause havoc in the vineyards’ early years.