
https://napavalleyregister.com/wine/napa-vallet-grapegrowers-report-the-beauty-of-bud-break/article_b394935c-87ae-53d5-9ce8-57f1ea4c5381.html

Napa Valley Grapegrowers Report

Napa Vallet Grapegrowers Report: The beauty of bud break

KRISTIN LOWE

Mar 27, 2021



Bud break, the first stage of the grapegrowing season, is now taking place throughout Napa County.

Emma K. Morris

KRISTIN LOWE

[Tracking Preferences](#)

Spring is my favorite time of year in the vineyard. Sure, my days start a bit earlier, and I know that there are long, hot work hours ahead once the season hits full swing. But those aren't my primary concerns on these crisp mornings in the vineyards, as I check the progress of pruning, wade through thigh-high mustard, and look for early signs of bud break. Instead, my thoughts turn to the possibilities of a healthy, high-quality grape crop, and renewed hope in the year ahead.



Quality journalism doesn't happen without your help

For better or for worse, vines have memories. They remember everything they have gone through since they were planted. Were they trained well early on, so that now the trunks are nice and straight? Were they irrigated properly in their youth so their root systems could become fully established? Were they pruned correctly to balance their growth potential and crop load? Vineyard folks know the importance of history when it comes to their vineyards, and that every suite of decisions we make today builds on those made in the past.

On a smaller scale, the explosion of growth that signals bud break is not just the start of this year's growing season, but a reflection of last year as well. Most of us would be happy to forget 2020, but during all the tragedy, loss, pain and trials we faced, the vines continued to do what they always do—work within the current season they were dealt, and resiliently forge ahead.

Starting at bloom time last year (May), the vines quietly started to make plans for the future. While growers were anxiously observing the weather and the opening flowers, hoping for favorable temperatures and a good fruit set, the vines began to form

clusters for 2021 within developing buds along their shoots.

These buds matured over the course of the year into dormant buds, and those that remain after pruning time hold the fruit potential for the following season. The grapes we can see in the summer and fall months garner the most concern and attention for the season, and rightly so. But the vines are also writing more stories about what will come next.

The dormant bud is a truly resilient structure. A preformed shoot lies within, telescoped down and miniaturized, packaged safely amongst layers of protective woolly hairs – nestled in its own insulation. This shoot already has the nascent form of between 6 to 10 leaves, and 1 to 3 flower clusters, predestined to ultimately result in the coming year's vintage.

In addition to this primary bud structure, there are also backups, with the potential for two, sometimes even three shoots per dormant bud. They are compound buds, with contingency plans built-in. If the primary bud pushes and is damaged, for example by frost, another will push from that same position. It might not be as strong, or as fruitful, but the potential is still there. It is a vine's version of disaster insurance.

The beauty of bud break is undeniable. A verdant explosion of growth emerges from orderly rows of carefully tended dark wood. It is subtle at first. The color of the shoot tips themselves varies with variety, from creamy pale yellow with Petit Verdot, to a crimson-tinged bronze for Cabernet Sauvignon. As the telescoped shoots rapidly grow, bright green leaves appear and unfurl.

At only a couple inches of growth, flower clusters appear as well. Tiny globular pale yellow and pink structures also expand to show their branching structure during the rapid spring growth period. We look at them, count them, note with concern their absence, remark on their potential size, and maybe, just maybe also think about what was happening last year during the time of their initial formation. They will finish their story this year, while others begin anew.



At bud break, we are on the cusp of what the season will bring. We don't know exactly what will happen with the weather, but we do know we are dealing with a serious drought year. A cause for concern, but also an opportunity to reflect on the decisions we can make, and operations we can implement in the vineyard. Growers can manage the vineyard floor to minimize vines competing for water with weeds and cover crops. Vineyard crews can start to shoot thin early, remove extraneous growth, and concentrate the vine's energy into its vital shoots and clusters. Vineyard managers can plan how to use available water judiciously, work together with wineries to decide which blocks need it the most, and when irrigation applications should occur.

Like new buds, we approach 2021 with hope for the future. As a community, we have weathered unspeakable losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires. It has humbled and frightened us to realize what we cannot control. But there are always proactive decisions we can make- to take care of ourselves and loved ones, and give to those who have less. We can recognize that our community is stronger when we work together and not as isolated individuals. We can choose to put aside differences and work together to find solutions so our industry and community can thrive, and make some plans for the future.

Bud break is here. Let's get to work and do what we can do, together.

For press inquiries regarding the 2021 growing season or bud break, please email Caroline Keller, marketing manager, at [**ckeller@napagrowers.org**](mailto:ckeller@napagrowers.org)

The Napa Valley Grapegrowers is a non-profit trade organization that has played a vital role in strengthening Napa Valley's reputation as a world-class viticultural region for 45 years. Its mission is to preserve and promote Napa Valley's world-class vineyards. NVG represents 685 Napa County grape growers and associated businesses.

[Tracking Preferences](#)