

What is the worst thing I can do to my grapes?

Planting them on the wrong site.

Which do you prefer: shoot removal or cluster thinning to remove crop? I realize this is an over-simple question but can you expound when one is better than the other.

Shoot removal is more of a canopy management practice to hold canopy density in check to allow for air and sunlight infiltration. Cluster thinning is a technique used to manage crop load and to remove late blooming clusters that will never be able to ripen completely prior to harvest. Both shoot removal and cluster thinning are important and both should be considered, especially when extreme conditions exist.

How early can we begin pruning in spring in light of the fact that we have occasional late frosts?

The real answer to this is to begin pruning any time after the coldest period of the winter is over, ie... start in February and to leave twice as many buds as required. Ninety-five percent of the work will be completed during the first pruning. You can then go back and prune to the required bud count after bud break. Waiting until the chance of late frosts are over, ie... Mid-May is not practical for a commercial vineyard.

Does it make sense to prune to 4 buds initially and then follow up after danger of frost to do a final pruning to 2 buds?

Yes, this is also called “Long” pruning. I highly recommend it.

I am considering the use of wood chips as mulch in the rows. Could you present the pros and cons of this approach to weed control?

Pros:

- Mulch will lower the soil temperature in the spring. This will often delay budbreak a few days.
- A minimum of 4” is needed to control weeds
- Often readily available from free sources.

Cons:

- 4” deep x 3’ wide = 120 cubic yds per acre = approximately 10 truckloads/acre = high labor, transport and time requirements
- Wood chips need to be removed from around vines each winter to keep rodents from moving in and girdling trunk.
- Wood chips will completely immobilize any nitrogen applications applied to the wood chips and immobilize any nitrogen they come in contact with in the ground. Wood chips should not be incorporated into the soil.
- Wood chips can keep the soil too wet during high rainfall periods.
- Special equipment (side discharge mulch spreaders) is needed to handle the huge volume of chips required for weed control

Main point – I am NOT a big fan of wood chips in commercial vineyards.

I have read that the maximum number of buds to leave is 70 per plant. We grow Edelweiss on a GDC and it's incredibly vigorous (4-5 lbs pruning weights) We normally leave 70 buds/plant. To devigorate should we leave even more?

You don’t want to have more than 4-6 buds per ft of cordon unless you are willing to divide the canopy vertically or horizontally. Consider the other methods listed in the Canopy Management webinar to reduce vigor.

We use an 8 wire VSP trellis system with 2 sets of fruiting wires at 30" and 36" which creates a narrow double curtain with the potential for 16' of fruiting surface on a moderately vigorous site. What are your thoughts about shoot positioning spacing in this situation?

It sounds like you have a Scott Henry type of training system. Typically the two fruiting wires are higher (ie. 42" & 48") allowing easier canopy work and more canopy to hang down. The Scott Henry system has the potential to give you 50-60% more canopy because of the downward hanging canopy and can give up to 30% more yield. The downward hanging canopy also tends to help devigor the vine. You could probably push your total bud count to 6-8/foot of row with this system. On the negative side, Scott Henry requires much more labor. I may be easier to have a single fruiting wire pruned to 5 buds per foot of row and use other methods to devigor the site.