

## Oregon 2009 - vintage report

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The Oregon Wine Board provided this detailed 2009 harvest report earlier this month. The growing- season weather round- up is followed by comments from producers in each of the main regions.

After an early and sometimes furious harvest, winemakers - now caught up on sleep - are reflecting on the 2009 harvest and reporting plentiful yields in some areas and the potential for a high- quality vintage.

Harvest continued into the third week of October for Willamette Valley and Eastern Oregon, and through the end of the month in Southern Oregon.

A warm and dry harvest period gave way to cooler than expected conditions in late September and early October, but fortunately the majority of the fruit statewide was at or near its ripening plateau, according to Dr Greg Jones, a climatologist at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon, who monitors conditions throughout the state's winegrowing regions.

Even with a cooler end to the season, the 2009 vintage cumulative growing degree day (GrDD) values for Roseburg (2,985), Medford (3,384) and Milton- Freewater (3,402) reveal a 4-14% increase over 2008, similar to the warm 2004 and 2006 vintages. For McMinnville (2,161), there was a 7% increase in heat accumulation over 2008, with values near the 2005 vintage; however units were slightly below the seven- year average.

The weather signature for 2009 is one of high week- to- week temperature variability with wide swings between both record high and record low maximum temperatures, Jones said, but with little to no effect on resulting fruit quality.

Rain events that occurred over the Labor Day and Columbus Day weekends did not negatively affect grape quality. Botrytis pressure was apparent but relatively low, and according to growers, easily sorted on the crushpad. A final heat spike at harvest dehydrated many clusters, reducing yields and concentrating flavours. Extended hang time was reported throughout the state, as growers and winemakers waited for optimal flavour development and ripeness to counter slightly elevated sugar levels.

'The barometer needle stayed in the dry zone well into October, with the long growing season enabling full flavor development', said Ted Farthing, executive director of the Oregon Wine Board. 'Another classic vintage, by a whisker.'

### Willamette Valley

'We had almost record long hang time this year. The fruit was deeply ripe and, because of a three- day, late- September heat spike, sugars got quite high. The wines seem in balance, though. The lush, ripe wines will probably be received quite enthusiastically if the past is any guide.' *Dick Shea, Shea Vineyard/ Shea Wine Cellars*

'There is a personality to each vintage, a pedigree made of weather and terroir that is both intellectually and hedonistically interesting. This vintage is similar to 2002, with good weather during harvest and lots of fruit, therefore satisfying both winemakers and accountants. Flavors are mineral- accented, with no real overripe characters. Whites are typically white flower, spices and stone fruit in character, again with no over- ripeness showing. In general, Pinot Noirs will be flashy and spectacular this year, with good heat for phenolic ripeness, cool final ripening conditions the last 3-4 weeks to retain acidity, and yields that, although not excessive with appropriate crop thinning, give great wines in good quantity. Some early- season heat in warmer sites contributed to a little botrytis and desiccation, so we justify sorting conveyors and even a pass of vineyard sorting, made easy to take with lots of clusters hanging. With site differences, we brought in fruit bright and acid- driven, but also rich and broad- palated, fruit from warm or lower- yielding sites.' *Harry Peterson- Nedry, Chehalem*

'Three weeks prior to harvest, we had one inch of rain over a weekend, followed by several warm days near 90 with drying winds. Concerns of the effects of desiccation/ shriveling have given way to fresh fruit aromatics with an emphasis on the high notes. Wines appear very balanced in their alcohol and acidity levels. Colour is in a normal range, neither light nor intensely dark.' *Ken Wright, Ken Wright Cellars*

'We ended up with that rare combination of excellent quality and quantity. Hang time was long, sugars were high, especially toward the end. But I'm convinced that there will be a lot of excellent wine made -- probably much like 2006. Here at Bethel Heights Vineyard, we left soft fruit hang for longer than I can remember in 30- plus vintages, and that has to be a good thing.' *Ted Casteel, Bethel Heights*

'This year is characterised by big berries, which means that patient vintners will be rewarded by long soaks and time coaxing flavours and pigment out of the fruit. 2009 will make good to excellent wine depending on skill and patience of the vintner. It is a year of the winemaker, not vineyard. Sugars got up there while we all waited for flavor, so alcohols will be higher but the flavor is there for those who know how to get it.' *Steve Girard, Benton- Lane Winery*

'As we approached harvest we had cooler, more normal temperatures. The result was that we saw Brix levels higher than normal, but we had plenty of hang time to reach full maturity without excessive alcohol in most varieties. Later- ripening varieties like Riesling ripened more slowly in the cool weather of mid- and late October, so alcohol levels were normal, but acid and pH levels were perfect. This vintage will give us big wines with plenty of ripe fruit character, but not at the expense of good acid balance. The Pinot Noir has very dark color and more body than usual for us. The early whites (Pinot Gris) will be ripe and mouth filling with more tropical notes but the late varieties like Riesling will be more typical of a cooler vintage.' *Rudy Marchesi, Montinore Estate*

### Columbia Gorge and Eastern Oregon

'The mid- season heat wave really accelerated sugar development, while flavour and grape maturity needed additional time on the vine. We picked our earliest ever, beginning in the last few days of September. The harvest was relatively compact, with most fruit in by 10 Oct. I see the flavours of 2009 being complex and immensely pleasurable. Expect big, crowd- pleasing wines.' *Bob Morus, Phelps Creek Vineyards*

'A hot summer made for an early harvest. We finished picking Seven Hills on 9 Oct. Quality seems very good, everything ripened at one time and we were held up while wineries tried to get fermenter space to take the second and third round. Sugars were well ahead of flavour; but even after waiting for flavour to catch up, harvest finished about 10 days ahead of normal.' *Norm McKibben, Pepper Bridge Vineyards, Seven Hills Vineyards (Walla Walla Valley)*

'Weather was very dry, moderately warm with no rain in September. The Walla Walla Valley received about an inch in early October, with minimal effects on quality. Picking was near 75% done when a severe frost event stopped further ripening on 11 Oct at most sites. Fortunately, this was a very ripe year already. Only very late varieties on very late sites will see quality affected. Yields were near normal for most vineyards. Tonnage will be slightly up for the valley over last year, due to new acreage coming on line. I would say this is a ripe year, alcohols will be above average, with great structure and color. Nice forward fruit flavors and aromas.' *Casey McClellan, Seven Hills Winery (Walla Walla Valley)*

### Southern Oregon

2009 tonnage was down 20-30%, but exceeded our expectations in quality. We started slow, but were able to take advantage of the warmer than normal weather in the late summer. We ended up harvesting at full ripeness, one to two weeks earlier than normal.' *Kara Olmo, Wooldridge Creek Winery (Applegate Valley)*

'It was an unusual harvest and did not follow my predictions of an early harvest. We started 10 days after our expected first pick and were in a picking frenzy. The sudden warmth during flowering had accelerated phenology on early, middle and late varieties, such that fruit maturity also occurred at the same time thus the need to pick everything at once. Excellent (flavours) with Tempranillo, Syrah and Albarino.' *Earl Jones, Abacela (Umpqua Valley)*

'Overall a very good year. There seem to be two standout points to this harvest - some very long hang times and very spicy fruit. I was worried heading into September that the sugars were getting ahead of the acid, pH, and flavour development in many of the vineyards where we buy fruit, but lo and behold, Mother Nature stepped in with some cooler weather and a touch of rain at the perfect time. As a result, we were able to hang out and wait. And wait. And then wait some more, pushing some of our post- verasion hang times out to as much as 80 days, producing what I think are some extremely high quality grapes.' *Pat Spangler, Spangler Vineyards (Umpqua Valley)*

'This is a very good quality year, characterised by the word 'balance'. Alcohols are slightly on the high side, but balanced with wine structure. Acid balance was very easy to achieve in the wines, as the total acidity/ pH relationship was in balance. Colour and flavour development were very good across the board. Grapes were fully ripe and exhibited very good varietal characteristics.' *John Quinones, RoxyAnn Winery (Rogue Valley)*