Pruning Young Vines

VineSmith LLC
vineyard services

The goal of pruning grape vines in the first few years is to establish 2 trunks and 2 cordons (or fruiting canes). The number of years it takes to establish those structures depends on the vigor of the vines. The vigor of the vines is determined by the variety, rootstock, availability of water and nutrients, and control of vertebrate, weed, insect and fungal pests. When all of these conditions lead to a "high vigor" vine, it may be possible to establish both trunks and cordons (or fruiting canes) after the first growing season. Conversely, it may take 3 or more years to establish the framework on low vigor vines.

Follow these steps to dormant prune and train each young vine:

1. Assess the vine's overall growth. If there are 2 strong straight canes originating just above the graft union, select them to be the trunks. If there is only 1 strong straight cane originating just above the graft union, select it to be the first trunk; you will train a second trunk from the base next growing season.

2. Cut the tips of your selected trunks to ascertain that they are alive. The interior wood of the cane should be bright green at the cut. If it is dull green or brown, keep cutting farther down the cane until you reach bright green wood.

3. Consider each trunk separately. If a trunk is at least the thickness of a pencil for 12+ inches beyond the fruiting wire, it will be pruned to "plan A". If it does not meet requirements for plan A, but is at least the thickness of a pencil up to the fruiting wire, it will be pruned to "plan B". If it does not meet requirements for plan B, it will be pruned to "plan C".

4. Prune each trunk back to:
   - Plan A: 12" beyond the fruiting wire
   - Plan B: 2-3 inches below the fruiting wire
   - Plan C: 2-3 buds

5. Remove any shoots other than your 2 selected trunks. Remove any lateral shoots, tendrils or old fruit clusters from your selected trunks.

6. Gently wrap (one revolution) each "plan A" trunk along the fruiting wire and tie at the end. Maintain a gap of 4 to 6" between trunks at fruiting wire.

vine 1 before pruning

max 4 to 6"

vine 1 after pruning:
left trunk = "plan A"   right trunk = "plan B"

vine 2 before pruning

vine 2 after pruning:
left trunk = "plan C"   right trunk = "plan B"