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Trimming and Storing Dormant Grape Rootings Before Planting

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Trimming Rootings

Cut tops back to a single good spur of 2 buds while attempting to keep the rootings of equal length for planting uniformity.

Trim off all of the roots except those at the base. Shorten the base roots to a 3 to 4 inch length - about a hand width. Trim them even shorter - 1-1/2 to 2 inches long - if the vines are to be machine planted.

Keep the rootings damp during trimming by covering and occasional sprinkling.

Storing Rootings

There are a variety of acceptable storage methods, each dependent on the grower's facilities and the time of planting. Basically, proper storage should keep them fresh and from breaking dormancy too early.

Newly dug rootings are usually sorted into bundles of 25. Larger bundles of untrimmed rootings are more subject to drying-out on the inside during temporary storage.

Soil or Sand Storage - Trimmed Rootings

Rootings to be planted by March 15 are best trimmed before storage. They can then be retied into bundles of 50 and completely covered with soil either in deep furrows or a pit. The

pretrimming eliminates rehandling before planting and reduces storage space. The storage area should be well drained and free of the root pests nematodes and phylloxera. Home garden or old vineyard and orchard sites should be avoided.

Preferred sites include fumigated soils within the new vineyard location or one specially set aside and prepared for nursery stock.

The trimmed rootings are stacked-in right-side-up and covered with 6 to 8 inches of soil. Washing soil down into the bundles is unnecessary and makes removal much more difficult. A light sprinkling on the storage area may be needed after prolonged dry, windy weather.

With a possible delay in planting - up to April 1 -the storage area should be shaded to delay bud break.

Soil or Sand Storage - Untrimmed Rootings

Some growers prefer to store rootings without trimming, but extreme care is needed to prevent drying. The rootings are stacked in a slanted position in deep furrows made with a border disc or a terracer or V-ditch blade. Storage in a slanted position makes it easier to cover a larger proportion of the plants with soil.

Rootings held for more than 2 weeks should be almost completely covered with soil making sure to obtain a "seal" from outside air.

Bud break will occur on the exposed shoots if the untrimmed rootings are held beyond mid-March. If so, soil should be thoroughly washed down around the roots to enable the rootings to replenish moisture lost from the new shoot growth.

Using Wood Shavings

Moist wood shavings or sawdust can also be used for temporary storage. Only a shaded area should be used and the shavings should be periodically sprinkled as needed.

Cold Storage

This is recommended for rootings held later than April 1. Otherwise, shoot and root growth before planting will deplete stored reserves and reduce plant vitality.

Bin storage: Trim the rootings, tie them into bundles of 50, and then pack them with moist shavings or sawdust into bins which are lined with plastic.

Each standard 4' x 4' x 4' bin will hold about 42 bundles by placing them horizontally in 3 layers of 14 bundles each. The shavings should be pre-wetted for at least 2 days to assure good moisture retention. Each layer of bundles is covered with shavings during packing, including the top layer. The top is then covered over with

plastic. Cold storage temperatures below 38 °F are recommended.

Cold storage rootings should first be warmed up and allowed to become "active" before planting. A 2 to 3 week period between cold storage and planting is recommended, depending on outside temperatures. A shaded area should be used to prevent hot spots from developing in the bins due to direct sun exposure.

This interval will provide for enough vine activity to begin growth soon after planting. Otherwise, some dessication of the tops can occur before fully dormant rootings begin growing after planting.

The bin-packed rootings are convenient for handling during planting - another advantage of this practice.

Open cold storage: Rootings can also be held in cold storage without prepacking. They are stacked on pallets or racks with the roots exposed. However, this is a very specialized technique which requires intermittent misting to maintain high humidity. Only those cold storage operators experienced and equipped for such a technique should be considered.

Vines coming from open cold storage can be warmed up and activated by trimming and then placing them in a V-ditch or furrows for about 2 weeks. They should be completely covered with 6 to 8 inches of soil.