

"I carry on mental dialogues with the shoots of the grapevine, who reveal to me grand thoughts and to whom I can retell wondrous things."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) German author, natural philosopher

I don't think it is a mere coincidence that this year we graduated our first EM residents, and I harvested my first grapes. I started planting grapevines in 2003, the same year we started our residency. It wasn't too many years ago that many people thought you couldn't start an EM residency in Nebraska, let alone a vineyard. As improbable as it seems, not only is there an EM residency, there are now more than 20 wineries and 200 vineyards in Nebraska. (<http://www.nebraskawines.com/>)

The more I learn about growing grapes, the more I see the similarities of tending grapes and attending residents. Because vineyards (and residencies) are very long lived, site selection, soil preparation, vineyard design and plant selection should be done carefully.

Site selection: There are numerous site considerations when starting a vineyard including air drainage, water drainage, soil characteristics, soil depth, orientation, and length of growing season. I planted north/south rows on an east facing slope with deep loess soil.

When starting a new residency, it is important that the local environment is supportive. The EM-RRC looks for things like patient volume, patient acuity, procedure numbers, the qualifications of the faculty, competent program leadership, a strong didactic program, and administrative support. We were fortunate to have everything needed for the original accreditation. Our recent 5 year full accreditation validates that our site is pretty good.

Soil preparation: The best time to amend the soil is prior to planting. After soil testing, I added lime, rock phosphate, humate, and earthworms to the soil.

There are a lot of clinical sites that have the patient volume and acuity to support a residency, but the 'soil' may not be fertile. Years before starting our residency, we had to prepare the Dean, the other departments and the EM faculty regarding what it takes to provide fertile ground for resident education.

Trellis selection: Grapevines cannot be grown satisfactorily without some sort of support system. The reasons for training vines onto a trellis include: maximizing light interception, minimizing disease pressure, and developing a strong straight trunk.

There are several trellis systems described, and I choose the Scott Henry trellis system to control vigor and maximize light exposure. (<http://www.henryestate.com/trellis.asp>)

The support and training systems of the 120+ EM residency programs are varied.

Medical students search for the training programs that best support their needs. We have worked hard to make our training program supportive of the needs of our residents.

Plant selection: The first year of planting, I chose an American cultivar named Cynthiana (unless you are from Missouri where it is called Norton). I chose it because it is disease tolerant. (<http://wine.appellationamerica.com/grape-varietal/Norton-%7C-Cynthiana.html>)

The second year I chose a French American cultivar named Brianna, because it is very cold tolerant. (<http://www.macscreekvineyards.com/wines.php?id=23>)

The third year I took some risk and planted two European varieties that field testing had shown promise for southeast Nebraska. Most people are familiar with Riesling but not with Lemberger. (http://www.germanwineusa.org/home_cellar/varieties_lemberger.php)

When we started the residency, we looked for the most 'disease tolerant' residents to start the program. Now that the program is established, we are able to take more risks.

Training: It takes about 3 years to establish a vine on a trellis, and about 5 years before it is full fruit bearing. The first year you do your best to protect the plant by watering it, putting it in a grow tube, and gently tying the shoots in an upright position hoping they make it to the bottom wire of the trellis. The second year you prune it back to 3 buds and hope it grows enough to form cordons on the trellis wires. The third year, you prune it again, and let it bear some fruit. By the fifth year, it is full fruit bearing.

I think this is a pretty good description of residency training, passing boards and starting your practice. The pruning process of residency training may seem painful at the times, but without it you will end up looking like a grape bush instead of a grape vine.

Harvesting: After hours of working in the vineyard throughout the growing season, it's hard to describe the feeling of the grape harvest. This year we harvested 1200 pounds of grapes, but within a few years the vineyard should yield about 10,000 pounds.

Sometimes it's hard for residents to see the hard work and personal sacrifice the faculty makes to train, (at) tend and prune them. It was also hard to describe the feeling of seeing our first group of residents graduate last June, and start to see them bear fruit this year as they pass their boards and start their practice.

Our senior class will soon be graduating. They will be working in Nebraska, Wyoming and Washington. They were a great class and we had fun pruning them.

This year we increased our class size to seven, and had a great match. We will soon be welcoming new residents from Nebraska, North Dakota, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin

One major change in the Department this year was the establishment of basic science research program led by Dr. Paul Tran. We obtained bench space and recruited a PhD scientist, Dr. Yu-Long Li. He is currently recruiting two post docs. The research emphasis will be in the areas of baroreceptor regulation, and limb ischemia/reperfusion.

We said goodbye to two faculty members who moved for family reasons. Dr. Seifert, former head of the Nebraska Poison Center, took a similar position at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Longwell went back to Austin, Texas. We will miss them both.

We hired three of our graduates. Drs. Jones, Spiegel and Asher will be working mainly at our freestanding ED. After they get their feet wet, they will spend some time supervising residents at the main ED.

Our ED family had another 'fruitful' year. Among our residents, Drs. Jones, Asher, and Schroeder had babies this year. Among our faculty, Drs. Larsen, Bott, and Oakes have had or soon will be having babies too.

If you are looking for a well prepared 'site', with good 'support' and 'training', I hope you consider applying to our program this year. We are looking forward to many good 'harvests' to come.

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