

HARVEST PARAMETERS

Determining when to harvest is often one of the grapegrower's biggest challenges. Traditionally, there are three parameters that can be measured objectively: °Brix (indicates approximate sugar level, measured by a refractometer); juice pH, measured by a pH meter; and titratable acidity (TA). It is important that measurements be taken on a representative sample. Take at least 100 berries, randomly selected from vines of the same cultivar, from several different locations in the vineyard. Place them in a zip-closed plastic bag, crush the berries and extract a sample of the juice to test for °Brix, pH and TA.

Suggested levels for white wine grapes:

°Brix – 18 to 22

pH – 3.2 to 3.0

TA – 0.8 to 1.2

Suggested levels for red winegrapes:

°Brix – 21 to 24

pH – 3.4 to 3.5

TA – 0.6 to 1.2

For grapes that become “foxy” or lose their acidity at high °Brix, such as ‘Edelweiss’, it is recommended to harvest the fruit considerably earlier, e.g., 13.5 to 15 °Brix (where legal, chaptalization – adding of sugar – may enable a suitable alcohol level to be achieved).

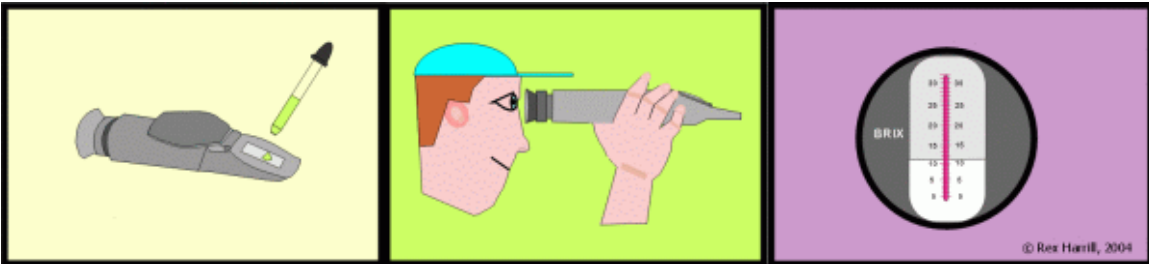
Winery personnel (the winemaker) may dictate that harvest take place when the grape parameters vary significantly from those noted above. Experienced winemakers often base their harvest timing preferences on past experience, especially the taste of the juice, which may provide them with a particular wine style that they prefer. Flavors, and other characteristics of a given cultivar may also influence harvest timing. Timing of harvest may be accelerated by bird, insect or disease pressure – damaged grapes do not make good wine. Some growers and/or winemakers also like to observe the color of the grape seeds, since the seeds progress from a green color to a light brown and eventually a dark brown or black as the berries mature. Observation of translucent pulp and drying of the pedicels (berry “stems”) are other examples of some of the observations that can be made.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD BRIX

Professor A. F. W. Brix was a 19th Century German chemist (b.1798, d.1890). He was the first to measure the density of plant juices by floating a hydrometer in them. The winemakers of Europe were concerned that they could not predict which of various grape juices would make the best wine. Being able to judge quality ahead of actual bottling was of immense importance in an industry where a bottle of the best wine might sell for hundreds of times more than a bottle of everyday wine. Professor Brix was greeted as a great hero and was also honored by having the measuring process named after him.

- °BRIX is a measure of the percent solids, or total soluble solids (TSS) in a given weight of plant juice---nothing more---and nothing less.

USING A REFRACTOMETER



1) Squeeze a drop of juice. 2) Look at the screen.

3) Check the chart.