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Do 100 lbs. of grapes fit in a 5 gallon bucket? No.

by Byron Burch

Why is it that it's so hard to remember how many containers are needed for your batch of wine, or how much some odd lot of grapes will yield? The answer isn't that we have all lost our marbles over the years, (although that is progressing in my case), but young and old winemakers have one distinct disadvantage over brewers, in that, they practice their hobby usually only once a year, in the fall when the grapes ripen. Quite frankly, it's tough to remember things from the year before, such as, how many containers did I use for 250 lbs. of grapes, or how much room does 25 gallons of must use in the press? So we had the idea to give a visual aid to this discussion, working in some accepted rules of thumb, to prompt the grey cells into action. If you have 100 lbs or 2000 lbs of grapes, these simple formulae will remind you how to calculate your yields.

The illustration here of a typical equipment set up, shows the necessary equipment to process a load of 250 lbs of red grapes and includes a stemmer crusher and press, which actually can be rented or even borrowed before buying is necessary. But the other components are not expensive and last for years of service, amortizing their cost easily after only a year of use.

In our photo lineup we are showing 1. the picking bins, 7 bins of this tote-size holding 35 lbs. apiece of fresh grapes equals 245 lbs., plus or minus a few pounds; 2. a 32 gallon bucket with lid in which to crush the grapes for primary fermentation (using the rule that 100 lbs of crushed grapes need 11 gallons of bucket space, thus 2.5 (100 lbs.) x 11 (gallons) = 27.5 gallons of space). 3. Moving the mass of grapes into the must during fermentation is called "punching down the cap", so the large bean masher is a great example of a tool for this purpose. 4. Of course a book or two would be helpful for reference, so we show our current favorites, Home Winemaking, Step by Step and Making Table Wines at Home.

The actual yield of pressed wine will vary due to the size of the berries and their ripeness, but a rule of thumb to calculate the yield is that for every 100 lbs. of must, you will need 7 gallons of secondary storage. Our example of 250 lbs. of must, will yield 2.5 (100 lbs.) x 7 (gallons) = 17.5 gallons. There are four carboy sizes available, 3, 5, 6 and 7 gallons. Plus we can use one gallon jugs. This variety of sizes of glass jugs will therefore cover most any storage need. 7. Illustrated for this batch are one six gallon, and two five gallon carboys fitted with airlocks.

In many ways glass containers offer the least expensive and easiest to maintain form of storage. You can add Oakboys, an oak stave designed to fit carboys, for adding oak flavor and aroma, or you can also put your wine in an oak barrel. 8. A 15 gallon barrel holds most of the wine in a single storage vessel for this batch, with the addition of a small carboy or several gallon jugs. Barrels need maintenance and a small barrel means that the wine can only be stored briefly, about 2 months, or overoaking will occur. So carboys will still be necessary for storage to provide a neutral container after the oak treatment, until bottling.

Most of the work of winemaking is done after harvest and crushing. After pressing, the wine is stored for many months at a time, left undisturbed to settle out cloudy material and leave a sparkling clear beverage. Although several transfers off of the sediment must be utilized, these rackings are simple to accomplish, moving the wine from one jug to another clean jug. You will need to have on hand a siphon hose and some cleaning and sanitizing products.

Finally at bottling time, you will have had time to save wine bottles, but many people like to get a fresh start with new glass. So how much wine did 250 lbs of grapes yield? 9. Probably about 75-80 bottles, or six and a half cases of wine bottles will be your net, but remember, that rackings remove some product and you might spill some or drink some along the way! Wine bottles of the standard size, 750ml. come with 12 bottles to a case and that holds 2.4 gallons of wine. So to calculate the number of cases, divide your gallons of wine by 2.4. Finally you will need to cork the bottles. 10. You'll need a pack of 100 corks and a lever corker for this process and allow yourself about 20 minutes for every 5 gallons.

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