

A look at this season's grape expectations

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Autumn is the time of year when grape growers all over the world lovingly harvest their crops and celebrate their bounty.

However, the recent adverse weather could put a damper on much of the merriment. Our world's shifting weather patterns have made it challenging for grape growers across the globe. Locally, with the recent rainstorms and flooding, I was concerned about its impact on Illinois wine production.

Harvest forecast

Overseas, it has been very difficult for grape growers. France experienced a cold, wet summer and had widespread attacks of vine mildew, translating into lower production this year. South Africa and Argentina also have repeated poor harvests. Parts of Australia

have suffered from a very hot, dry growing season and fires. The resultant ash will dominate their grape juice with notes of smoke and bacon.

On the other hand, California experienced ideal growing conditions. Grapes love warm, sunny summer days, cool nights and light rain. Winemakers check the grapes pH, acidity and brix (the amount of sugar, which is available to convert to alcohol) levels. When right, the growers rush to pick the crops before any heavy fall rains occur. Grape growers prefer a drier, warm summer as it creates some vine stress (resulting in better wine) and allows a grower to add, through irrigation, the amount of water the crop needs. You can always add water, but cannot take it away.

Locally, our Illinois winemakers had a more challenging year. Kori Faltz of the Fox Valley Winery reported the early summer provided weather the grapes love. The heavy rains in August adversely affected the grape pH, acidity and brix, so more time was needed on the vine to hopefully restore the grapes to the proper levels. The recent Labor Day sun helped. Assuming some fall sunshine, our wet August will delay the harvest and only affect the winemaker's production schedule.

Andres Basso, the Director of Winemaking at Lynfred Winery of Roselle informed me they source some grapes in Illinois and Michigan, but the majority of grapes come from California and Washington. Given the West Coast's good harvest conditions, they are confident in the quality of their 2007 vintage.

Wine festivals

This past weekend, there were three separate festivals celebrating the fall harvest. The Naperville Wine festival was held at the Naper Settlement. Your entrance ticket included a souvenir wine glass and 10 tastings from more than 200 wine selections. Geneva celebrated the 25th anniversary of their Festival of the Vine. Twenty local restaurants offered their signature dishes along with 14 wines to sample. Local merchants offered Festival specials and horse drawn carriage rides were available. The Fox Valley Winery offered grapes in large vats for stomping, and participants received a complimentary shirt with space for their grape stained footprints. One of the state's largest wine festivals was held at Starved Rock



From left, friends Joan Thompson of Streamwood and Pat Bohn of Elburn sample wine given to them by Terry Faltz during Fox Valley Winery's Wine and Vine Fest at Faltz Family Vinyards in Sheridan.
(HEATHER EIDSON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

State Park. This festival featured wines from 20 award-winning Illinois wineries. Both days featured Illinois grape seminars.

There's still time to enjoy this fall tradition. Coming up, there are two local wine festivals that are well worth checking out:

• **Harvest Fest When:** 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday

Where: Held at the Faltz Family Vineyards, 2714 N. 4251st Road, Sheridan.

Who: Fox Valley Winery

What: This fun day includes vineyard tours, wine tastings, a vintage baseball game, grape stomp and grape spitting contests and musical entertainment.

For more information: www.foxvalleywinery.com.

• **Lynfred's Annual Oktoberfest, Pig Roast and Grape Stomp**

When: 3 to 9 p.m. Sept. 29 and noon to 7 p.m. Sept. 30

Where: 15 S. Roselle Road, Roselle.

Who: Lynfred Winery.

What: Lots of wine, food and fun are guaranteed at this annual event. Activities for the whole family with German sing-a-longs, grape spitting, grape stomping, cork tossing and barrel races! Plentiful food with roasted pig, warm German potato salad and all the fixings plus bratwurst and "heavenly" sweet corn. Tasty desserts are also available.

For more information: www.lynfredwinery.com.

Bill Garlough is a Level One Master Sommelier. He also is an owner of My Chef Catering of Naperville, the 2007 Recipient of the US Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year Award. He can be reached at www.mychef.com or winepairings@mychef.com.