



## Use of Tissue Analysis in Viticulture

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Tissue analysis in vineyard nutrition is much more effective and reliable than soil analysis. Soil analysis does not give an accurate indication of the nutrient status of the vine. The many types of vineyard soils, the vines' potentially deep and far-ranging root system, differing irrigation practices, and the inherent differences in nutrient uptake by grape varieties and rootstocks are largely responsible for the inability to correlate soil nutrient levels and vine nutrient status. The value of soil analysis is in the determination of problems related to certain chemical imbalances or excesses such as pH problems (alkalinity and acidity), salinity, and excess boron. Further information on soil appraisal of chemical problems is available in "Salinity Appraisal of Soil and Water for Successful Production of Grapes", University of California DANR Leaflet 21056.

### Sampling

The method of sampling is dependent on the objective: (1) survey of nutrient status, (2) follow-up nutrient sampling, and (3) diagnosing visual symptoms and disorders.

#### 1. Survey of nutrient status

This approach is used when surveying a vineyard for general nutrient status and evaluating fertilizer needs or practices. Most of the data and experience in California are based

on leaf petioles sampled at bloom. The petioles are taken from opposite flower clusters near the base of the shoot. This provides a clean, easily sampled, repeatable tissue which tends to accumulate nutrients more than other plant parts. The samples should be taken during bloom, the nearer to full bloom the better ("full bloom" is when approximately two-thirds of the caps have loosened or fallen from the flowers). The full bloom sample assures that the tissue will be at the same physiological stage regardless of district and seasonal differences.

Samples should be taken from a single block or management unit and should represent a single variety and rootstock. Areas of distinctly different soil, vine appearance, or other condition should be sampled separately. Each sample should consist of 60-80 petioles collected from representative vines uniformly distributed over the area. Sample from minimally shaded, normally-growing shoots on both sides of the vine canopy. Some laboratories may request 100 petioles per sample when petioles are small (e.g., Pinot noir and Gewurtztraminer) or multiple analyses are to be run.

Growers who routinely sample vineyard blocks from year to year may wish to designate specific rows or vines in a representative area. Re-sampling the same vines each time improves consistency in the results when tracking the

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vineyard's nutrient status and adjusting fertilizer practice over years.

Foliage contamination from a nutrient spray will give erroneous laboratory results. Do not sample after a nutrient spray unless you: (1) are not analyzing for any nutrient element contained in the spray, (2) thoroughly wash the samples (see **Handling Samples** below) or have made arrangements with the laboratory for sample washing, or (3) are sampling uncontaminated tissue later in the season. Sampling uncontaminated tissue is preferable, as it is difficult to remove all of the nutrient residue, especially when adjuvants are used with the spray.

## 2. Follow-up nutrient sampling

Certain nutrients which are in the questionable range at bloom can be re-checked later in the season to determine if deficiency has developed. This is particularly useful with K which declines in the vegetative parts and can become deficient during fruit ripening. Sampling is best performed at veraison (berry softening at beginning of ripening) as it represents another physiological stage with supportive data and when leaf tissue is still healthy and functioning. Select petioles from recently matured leaves. This would be the second fully expanded leaf, usually the 6th to 7th leaf from the tip, on an actively growing shoot. The sample leaves should have the color and texture of the other mature leaves rather than the lighter and more shiny, tender appearance of young, expanding leaves.

The smaller petioles at this time may require a higher number in the sample as compared to bloom. Take 75 to 100 petioles per sample if more than one determination is needed. For blade samples, 25 to 35 are sufficient due to their greater mass as compared to petioles.

## 3. Diagnosing visual symptoms and disorders

Visual deficiency or toxicity symptoms more

commonly appear during mid-summer to harvest time. Thus, sampling at this time is useful in diagnosing vine disorders or verifying a deficiency or toxicity. For such situations, sample the affected leaves regardless of location on the shoot and at any time when abnormal appearance is noted. When there are no reasonable clues, take both the petioles and blades but analyze them separately. If sodium (Na) and/or chloride (Cl) toxicity are suspected, analyze only the petioles (these elements accumulate in the petioles, even though the blades may show the symptoms). For excess boron (B), use the blades where much greater levels will be found.

It is also a good practice to take a sample of "non-symptom" tissue for comparison when the cause is in question. The "non-symptom" sample can be taken from an area adjoining the "symptom" area while making sure that the comparative samples are taken from the same position on the vine.

## Handling Samples

Place each sample in a well-labeled, clean paper bag and deliver to the laboratory as soon as possible. If there is a delay, keep the bags open in a dry, well-ventilated place. This will begin the drying process and prevent molding. Never use plastic bags.

Petioles need not be washed unless collected from an unusually dusty vineyard or have residue remaining from a nutrient spray. Leaf blades have a greater surface area for collecting dust and should be washed if they are noticeably dirty. Foliar nutrient sprays can be difficult to wash off because of the adjuvants that are sometimes used. Wash in water containing a small amount of detergent followed by a tap water rinse and two distilled water rinses. Remember, however, that some elements (particularly potassium (K), Na, and Cl) are easily leached from necrotic or dead tissue. Washing should therefore be accomplished quickly, and excess water blotted from the leaves. Blades, in particular, should be

dried quickly to avoid molding. Refrigeration is also a way to maintain sample freshness if there is a delay in getting samples to the laboratory for washing.

A forced-air or well-ventilated oven at 60° to 80°C (140° to 176°F) is ideal for sample drying. Growers have also successfully dried samples in a vehicle parked in the sun with the windows slightly open.

## Analyses Needed

Only those nutrients known to be deficient or excessive in the district need to be analyzed. For example, nitrogen (N), K, magnesium (Mg), Na, Cl, zinc (Zn), and B are more commonly of concern. Nutritional problems of phosphorus (P), manganese (Mn), and calcium (Ca) are uncommon or rare. Copper (Cu) and molybdenum (Mo) problems have not been confirmed in California. Iron (Fe) deficiencies cannot be accurately confirmed with tissue analysis due to lack of correlation of tissue levels with visual symptoms.

Growers may wish to include a broad analysis in their initial sampling, even if there is little chance for deficiency. This will, at least, verify that rarely-deficient nutrients such as P, Ca, and Mn are not necessary in most fertilizer programs. Also, some laboratories will run a “complete” analysis for the same cost as four or five elements.

Survey sampling establishes a base line for general nutritional status. This may be practiced for two or three years to determine yearly differences. Thereafter, only questionable nutrients or those involved in a fertilizer program require further testing. However, fluctuating yields or changes in trellising, pruning, or irrigation practices would warrant continued sampling.

## Interpretation of Laboratory Analysis

The following interpretations in Table 1 give critical values for important grapevine nutritional elements in

opposite cluster petioles at bloom unless otherwise noted. The deficiency level is that at which deficiency symptoms may develop and/or a measurable response to fertilization with the nutrient in question can be expected.

Critical levels for nitrate-nitrogen ( $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$ ) are only established for Thompson Seedless. The levels for other nutrients are based on experience with several or more varieties and thus can be applied generally among varieties, as far as is known.

**Nitrate-nitrogen ( $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$ ).** It is well known that grape varieties have inherently different  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  levels. This is, at least, partly attributed to differences in nitrogen metabolism (reduction of  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  in the foliage). For example, Malbec, a high nitrate ( $\text{NO}_3$ ) variety, shows lower nitrate reductase activity than Zinfandel, a moderate  $\text{NO}_3$  variety. Nitrate reductase is an important enzyme involved in  $\text{NO}_3$  reduction, the first step toward conversion to other nitrogen compounds; its lower activity explains why  $\text{NO}_3$  may accumulate more in varieties such as Malbec. Petiole  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  is also known to be affected by climatic conditions prior to and during bloom. Thus, critical levels will need to be developed for each variety in various regions. This has only been accomplished with own-rooted Thompson Seedless in the San Joaquin Valley.

Meanwhile, varieties have been grouped according to their typical differences in  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  levels as shown in Table 2. This information is based on data from where many varieties are grown on own roots in uniform trial sites. It shows Thompson Seedless to be of medium  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  status while some of the other important varieties are in comparatively high or low categories. Obviously,  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  interpretation with varieties other than Thompson Seedless could be misleading.

Table 1. Interpretive Guide for Grape Tissue Analysis at Bloom and Veraison

Nutrient	Deficient (below)	Adequate (above)	Excessive <sup>2</sup> (above)	Toxic <sup>3</sup> (above)
NO <sub>3</sub> -N, ppm	350 <sup>1</sup>	500	2,000	8,000
P (total), %	0.10 (0.08) <sup>4</sup>	0.15 (0.12) <sup>4</sup>		
K (total), %	1.0 (0.5) <sup>4</sup>	1.5 (0.8) <sup>4</sup>		
Mg (total), %	0.2	0.3		
Zn (total), ppm	15	26		
Mn (total), ppm	20	25	300	1,200
B (total), ppm	25	30	100	150
Na (total), %				300 in blades 0.5 0.3 in blades
Cl (total), %			0.5-1.0	1.5 0.5 in blades

<sup>1</sup>Critical NO<sub>3</sub>-N levels are based on Thompson Seedless data only. Some laboratories report as % NO<sub>3</sub>. Multiply % NO<sub>3</sub> by 2258 for ppm NO<sub>3</sub>-N (i.e., 1.0% NO<sub>3</sub> = 2258 ppm NO<sub>3</sub>-N).

<sup>2</sup>Excessive levels may be cautionary rather than indicating known effects on vine performance.

<sup>3</sup>Critical toxicity values are not well defined due to variety, growing condition, and seasonal differences.

<sup>4</sup>Veraison (berry softening) petiole values are in parenthesis.

Table 2. Ranking of Grape Varieties by Their Comparative Bloomtime Petiole NO<sub>3</sub>-N Levels When Grown on Own Roots.

High	High-medium	Medium	Low-medium	Low
Malbec	Petite Sirah	Pinot noir	Barbera	Sylvaner
Merlot	Chenin blanc	Semillon	French Colombard	Salvador
Grenache	Emerald Riesling	Cabernet Sauvignon	Gerwurztraminer	Ribier
Tinta Madeira	Muscat of	Rubired	Tokay	Flame Seedless
White Reisling	Alexandria	Ruby Cabernet		
Sauvignon blanc	Emperor	Chardonnay		Perlette
Black Corinth	Christmas Rose	Zinfandel		
Redglobe		Carignane		
		<b>Thompson Seedless</b>		
		Ruby Seedless		
		Calmeria		
		Exotic		
		Italia		

<sup>1</sup>Based on data of L. P. Christensen, W. M. Kliewer, and J. A. Cook, UC Davis.

For example, Flame Seedless and French Colombard can be highly vigorous with relatively low  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  levels of 150-200 ppm. This points to the inappropriateness of using the Thompson Seedless data to diagnose deficiency in other varieties. Petiole  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  with other varieties should only be used in a general way to follow fertilizer practices over years or to look at extremely low or high levels along with vigor assessment.

Nitrate-N status can also be strongly influenced by rootstock. Higher petiole values are commonly experienced with Freedom, Ramsey (Salt Creek), St. George, and 3309C. Lower values are more common with 5C, 420A, Harmony and 110R. The interaction of rootstock and fruiting variety is not well understood, although  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  status of some varieties such as Flame Seedless and Merlot are known to be strongly influenced by rootstock.

Seasonal changes in  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  levels can be rapid, especially with extreme weather changes before bloom. Increases are associated with cool temperatures and low light intensity while sunny, warm weather favors decreased levels. They are typically highest 5 to 10 days before bloom, decline through the bloom period, and reach a relatively stable, lower level by 2 to 3 weeks after bloom.

Nitrate-N levels can also vary widely from year to year without changes in fertilization practices. This is most often associated with differences in springtime weather conditions as mentioned above. Non-irrigated vineyards subjected to wide differences in rainfall can be particularly affected.

Critical levels of **total N** analysis have not been established due to the relatively small differences in tissue levels between vines responding to N fertilization. This is apparently due to the masking effects of the large amount of protein N which makes up the leaf tissues as compared to the assimilable N forms, including  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$ . However, there is interest in using total N values due to the problems of seasonal, regional, and varietal variability of  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$ . Sources in the foreign literature suggest critical deficiency values of <0.5 and <1.5%

total N in bloom petioles and blades, respectively. These values should be used with caution, as they are not based on California data and experience.

Remember, the final criteria in N fertilization is assessment of vine canopy and rate of growth. Highly vigorous vines do not need N regardless of tissue levels.

**Phosphorus (P).** Confirmed deficiencies have been rare in California, although they are increasingly recognized in some coastal and foothill sites, especially in acidic and high Fe soils. Tissue analysis has been useful in separating them from similar-appearing problems such as Leafroll Virus and Willamette Mite injury. Petiole P levels tend to decline through the bloom period and level off through midsummer; hence, critical levels change somewhat during the season. Differences among mature leaf petioles along the shoot are minor. Levels in the same vineyard can fluctuate as much as 100% from year to year.

There are wide differences among grape varieties and rootstocks. Rootstocks which tend to increase P levels include Ramsey, 110R, 1103P, and St. George; rootstocks associated with lower P levels include 039-16, 3309C, 420A, 101-14Mgt, and Harmony. These differences are presumed to be due to rootstock effects on P uptake.

**Potassium (K).** Tissue analysis will confirm deficiency symptoms and is particularly useful in identifying isolated areas which warrant treatment. Vines in the questionable range at bloom should be rechecked 6-10 weeks later at veraison by sampling recently mature leaf petioles. This will determine if deficiency is developing at fruit ripening, a more common occurrence.

Petiole levels usually decline most rapidly from before bloom until 2 to 4 weeks afterwards. Thereafter they decline gradually or level off through midsummer. Heavy crop loads can lower petiole K levels dramatically during fruit ripening. Harvest-time levels associated with deficiency symptoms are 0.3% and below. A critical level of 0.5% at harvest is recommended.

Potassium levels are highest in the youngest mature leaf petioles where they peak at bloom and then decline with time and leaf age. Potassium levels can vary widely (30-50%) from year to year in the same vineyard and are strongly affected by variety, rootstock, and irrigation practice.

Rootstocks which tend to result in higher petiole K levels include Freedom, Harmony, St. George, and 039-16; lower-K rootstocks include 420A, 110R, 5BB, 3309C, and 140Ru. These differences may contribute to fruit pH effects as well as vine susceptibility to K deficiency.

**Magnesium (Mg).** Petiole levels increase as the growing season progresses and tend to be higher in older petioles. Critical levels are probably higher later in the season, but they have not been established. For example, mild deficiencies may occur in late season with levels of 0.5% Mg or more.

Mg tends to be reciprocal to K in tissue concentration, a relationship that is strongly influenced by variety and rootstock, as well as soil levels. Ratios of K:Mg under deficiency situations vary too widely to be diagnostic. However, they can be indicative of extremes where antagonism may contribute to either Mg or K deficiency. For example, Mg deficiency is more commonly associated with K:Mg ratios of >10:1 with petiole Mg levels at <0.2%. General K deficiencies are more commonly noted in high Mg serpentine soils where bloom petiole levels may be above 3.0% Mg and with corresponding low levels of K. Even so, the absolute levels of Mg and K, rather than their ratios, are the most definitive indication of deficiency.

**Calcium (Ca).** Critical tissue levels are not given, as Ca deficiency has not been documented in California. The benefits of Ca in amending sodic (high Na) or acid soils are well known, but this practice is based on soil analysis. Direct vine response to Ca has only been demonstrated under extremely high Mg conditions, presumably due to Mg antagonism to Ca and K. “Normal” petiole

levels begin at 0.5% Ca, most commonly range from 1.0 to 2.0%, and can occur above 3.5% in petioles where Mg and K levels are low.

**Zinc (Zn).** Grape varieties and rootstocks vary widely in susceptibility to Zn deficiency. Most varieties fit within the critical levels given, although sensitive varieties such as Ribier, Merlot, and Muscat of Alexandria should always be maintained above the adequate threshold level. Low susceptibility varieties such as Perlette and Chenin blanc will tolerate levels at or slightly below the deficient level of 15 ppm Zn.

Differences in petiole levels along the shoot and changes during the growing season are minor. Bloomtime levels are most critical because of possible fruit set and “shot berry” effects.

**Manganese (Mn).** California experience with deficiencies is limited due to the small number of occurrences. Levels above 200 to 300 ppm usually indicate a low pH or acid soil. Soil pH's of 5.5 or less are very common at this range. This is due to increased Mn availability in acid soils. High Mn is probably not a problem until 1,200 ppm or higher is reached. The toxic level is not well defined due to a lack of experience in California; it is based on European literature where toxic levels range up to 5,000 ppm.

Vines with iron chlorosis problems will sometimes show deficient levels of Mn. These problems have been corrected with iron treatments. The relationship to Mn nutrition has not been determined.

**Boron (B).** Both deficiency and toxicity of B are found in California vineyards. Deficiencies are found in the coastal highlands and the granitic alluvial soils along the east side of the Central Valley. Toxicities are mostly associated with soils derived from the sedimentary coastal mountain ranges, especially where well waters exceed 1 ppm B.

Petiole levels normally do not vary markedly along the shoot or during the growing season. However, in soils with high B, the petiole levels increase gradually throughout the season.

Boron accumulates more in the blades. Thus, in high-B areas, the levels increase markedly during the season and are higher in the older leaves. Samples of affected blades will readily confirm toxicity.

**Iron (Fe).** Critical levels have not been established, because there is no correlation between Fe deficiency and tissue levels. Deficiencies are related more to Fe mobility with the plant rather than the total Fe levels. Petiole levels range widely from 50 to 300 ppm but most typically from 70 to 200 ppm. Iron contamination of the sample from dust, equipment, etc. is a common analytical problem.

Iron deficiency problems in high lime soils should utilize lime-tolerant rootstocks. Otherwise, correction with soil and foliar Fe treatment is often temporary and partial, as well as expensive.

**Chlorine (Cl).** Varieties and rootstocks differ widely in tolerance. Chlorine continues to accumulate during the growing season and does so predominately in the petiole, although the symptoms of excess appear in the blades. Leaf injury from Cl sometimes occurs at petiole levels down to 0.8% in sensitive varieties such as Barbera and when Na is high. Blade analysis may help to confirm toxicity.

**Sodium (Na).** Effects of excess Na have not been clearly defined, because they are usually associated with high Cl. Sodium may aggravate a Cl problem. Petiole levels of over 0.5% Na at bloom suggest problems, especially if K is relatively low. Visual symptoms of leaf margin discoloration (black staining) and necrosis have been associated with blade levels above 0.5% Na.

Sample each vineyard area separately

Zinfandel

Chardonnay

A. deep  
sandy  
loam

C.  
shallow  
loam

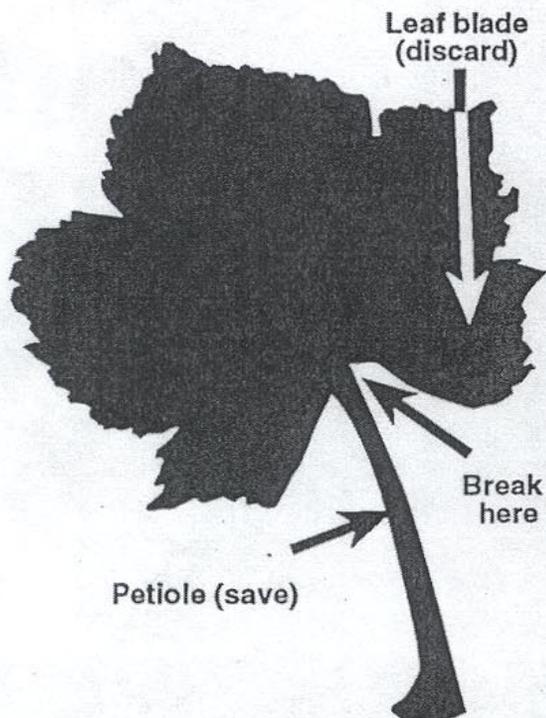
B.  
medium depth  
fine sandy loam

D.  
E.

Select petiole  
opposite either  
basal cluster  
during bloom



Collect petioles and discard the blade  
for nutrient analysis



Collect petioles  
taken from  
recently mature,  
full-sized leaves  
at veraison

