



WILLAKENZIE ESTATE

SUSTAINABLE VITICULTURE

Respect for the soil is of primary importance at WillaKenzie Estate because it is the soil that provides the grapevines with nutrients and gives the winegrapes their distinctive flavor profiles. We see the vineyards and surrounding pastures and forests as a whole ecosystem. Our vineyard practices come from our belief in sustainable agriculture with the goal of producing the very highest level of fruit quality, while minimizing the use of chemicals and synthetic fertilizers in order to protect the environment and those who work in the vineyards and drink our wine.

In search for distinctiveness of the WillaKenzie terroir, we are taking care of our soil. In the winter it is important to protect the soil against erosion, especially on steep slopes, so all of our vineyards are planted with cover crops of low-growing, mixed vegetation during the winter. We encourage native plants to grow between our vine rows and on our vineyard roads. Throughout the growing season, these cover crops are left in selected rows to control grapevine vigor by competing for moisture and nutrients, as well as providing shelter for a host of beneficial insects, which attack insect pests. We also care for our soil by using compost under the vines, providing a source of slowly released nutrients, while adding organic material, or humus, to the soil. In addition to supplying good nutrition to the grapevines, humus improves the water-holding capacity of the soil. We analyze the soil not only for nutrients, but also for the presence of microorganisms: bacteria, algae and fungi that process and decompose the organic materials into nutrients that can be absorbed by the vines.

Our fertilization program is eclectic, with a preference for more slowly released organic materials such as kelp, fish fertilizer, and composted manure. Chemical fertilization provides quicker results, but neither improves the soil nor provides many of the necessary micronutrients, such as the trace minerals iron, manganese, zinc, copper, and boron that are required in small quantities as catalysts in plant growth. Given that chemical fertilizers kill many of the organisms in the soil and are also highly polluting for the surrounding environment, we prefer the organic source.

The vineyards at WillaKenzie Estate are certified by both L.I.V.E and Salmon-Safe. L.I.V.E. (Low Input Viticulture & Enology) is an Oregon-based nonprofit organization, providing education and certification for vineyards using international standards of sustainable viticulture practices in winegrape production. These standards of practice come from a vision of the vineyard as whole system, and promote biological diversity, natural fertility and ecosystem stability through responsible land stewardship. LIVE also partners with Salmon-Safe to restore and maintain healthy watersheds. Salmon-Safe is an independent nonprofit, based in Portland, devoted to restoring agricultural and urban watersheds so that salmon can spawn and thrive. Native salmon are a key species within the Pacific Northwest and their conservation is closely intertwined with the health of our larger ecosystem. Erosion and runoff from hillside vineyards can bring silt into streams, reducing the ability of native salmon to spawn and thrive. That's why Salmon-Safe, in partnership with LIVE, is working with pioneering winegrape growers like WillaKenzie Estate to protect important salmon habitat by planting trees on streams, growing cover-crops to control runoff, and applying natural methods to control weeds and pests.



Manual work in the vineyards and cultivation practices: Weed control is a necessity in vineyards, as weeds compete with grapevines. Many herbicides have been developed, which will “clean up” all the grasses and weeds on the vineyard floor, leaving only the vines. We avoid using herbicides, however, because we want to encourage a diversity of living creatures in our vineyards, above and below the ground. For weed control, we use various mechanical tools that cultivate the soil under the vines, including a finishing touch of hand hoeing around the vines, and we also mow the cover crop where we do not till the soil. Instead of looking bare, our vineyards are full of clover, flowers, grasses and herbs, in addition to grapevines.



Because the climate in the Willamette Valley is often wet, we have to protect our vineyards from fungal infections, such as powdery mildew and botrytis. Chemical companies have developed a whole array of highly effective, systemic, synthetic fungicides appropriate for grapevines. We prefer to use sulfur and other organic materials, which are not absorbed into the plant and are safer for the entire ecosystem. Another reason to limit the use of chemical fungicides is to reduce the buildup of resistance to important pesticides so that they work when really needed.

We attempt to avoid disease in the vineyard not only by spraying sulfur on a rigorous schedule, but also by managing the leaf canopy carefully. This includes manually training the vine shoots vertically on our trellis so they do not overlap, and judiciously removing leaves by hand as needed to bring sunlight and airflow into the vines.

Overall benefits: Although grape growing following the sustainable agricultural model is far more labor-intensive and more expensive than the conventional chemical alternative, the benefits justify the extra work. The wines better reflect our soils and our clonal diversity through absorption of soil minerals, and contain fewer residual chemicals. The longevity of the soil is greatly enhanced, and our workers' exposure to chemicals is minimized.