

California winemakers don't usually have time to talk during the harvest season, but this week they're chatty. The [2011 harvest is more or less underway](#), says Wine Spectator, but thus far it's mostly whites and sparkling wine grapes that are being picked. "It's looking like another compressed, nail-biter of a harvest," said Carlisle winemaker Mike Officer, with all the grapes ripening at once, rather than the tidy six- to eight-week schedule winemakers prefer. The season has been running late all year, and some areas like the Central Coast had severe frost. It also rained in June during bloom, which created mildew and botrytis in the vineyards. In sum, it's a small crop and several weeks behind schedule.

"Last week's heat wave made some numbers jump, but this week's cooling has things stalled again," said Brian Loring of Loring Wine Company, who harvests mostly Pinot Noir from Central and Northern California. He postponed his first Pinot harvest from Tuesday until Friday. "Sugars were there and seeds nice and brown, but acid levels were through the roof."

Justin Smith, winemaker of Saxum, is facing a similar experience with Syrah and Grenache. "We are still really behind despite the nice heat we've had over the last couple weeks," he said. "We will probably pick a few hilltop Syrah blocks in a couple weeks but won't start really rocking until mid-October." Michael Scholz, winemaker at St. Supery in Napa Valley, began harvesting Sauvignon Blanc last week but doesn't expect to bring in the last of it until October. "Reds are a long way out, but look good on the vine. I doubt that we will see much action with the red harvest until next month." On California's Central Coast, Brian Talley of Talley Vineyards started night harvesting Pinot Noir in Rosemary's Vineyard on Monday and said they were bringing in only a ton to the acre. "We like what we're seeing so far," Talley said, "The colors and flavors are great."

Officer may harvest some Zinfandel in Sonoma and Dry Creek valleys later this month, but said, "October will definitely be crunch time. We may even be harvesting DuPratt Zinfandel from Mendocino Ridges in November, if the weather holds." And that's a big "if" considering the last few harvests. Smith summed up what every grower and winemaker is thinking when he said, "I'm just hoping we don't get a crazy mid-October storm like we got in 2009. That might really put the kibosh on things."

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