



- 2014 Vintage Overview -

Washington saw a second consecutive warm growing season in 2014. For growers in many areas, it was their warmest vintage on record. “The heat was unrelenting,” one said.

The season started out with a dry winter, with some areas receiving as little as half of the average annual precipitation. The warm weather throughout the growing season led to an advancement of most markers, including budbreak, bloom and veraison, which each ran approximately 10 to 14 days ahead of historical averages.

For the first few months of the growing season, heat accumulation tracked fairly closely to 2013. However, come July and August, 2014 raced ahead. July in Prosser (Yakima Valley) was the warmest on record according to Washington State University (WSU). For the season, WSU’s Prosser weather station recorded 3,092 Growing Degree Days (GDD)—a measure of heat accumulation—compared to a historical average of 2,627. Most Eastern Washington WSU weather stations also reported heat accumulation in excess of 3,000 GDD, quite warm for the state. Meanwhile Red Mountain, typically Washington’s warmest area, recorded a whopping 3,599 GDD, numbers more often associated with some areas of the Napa Valley.

The warm temperatures led to an early start to harvest, with some areas of the Columbia Valley beginning to pick fruit in the third week of August. Some growers reported that it was their earliest start to harvest ever. The warmth of the year also led to a compression of the harvest season, with varieties that typically have some spacing between them coming in together. This created space issues in the winery as winemakers had to respond to a large amount of fruit coming in all at once.

Unlike 2013, where the temperatures cooled markedly in mid-September, warm temperatures continued straight through the middle of October. “It was almost like a never-ending summer this year,” said one grower. Whereas harvest in Washington can often continue until the end of October and even into early November, in some areas growers had finished picking by early to mid-October, though larger production sites continued to harvest fruit for another several weeks.

The warmth of the year led to higher sugar levels in the grapes in many areas. However, winemakers felt the resulting wines would not be excessively ripe or alcoholic. In fact, many are quite excited about the vintage. “The wines in barrel show a combination of depth, power and yet vitality,” one said.