2016 Vintage Overview

2016 continued the trend of warm growing seasons in Washington marked by an early start. Bud break and bloom were significantly advanced from historical dates, with bloom occurring in some areas as early as the third week of May, a good two-plus weeks ahead of average. By the end of May, 2016 was easily on pace to surpass 2015 as the warmest vintage on record.

To everyone's surprise, beginning in June, temperatures swung back toward normal. "As we all know weather is very unpredictable and we did not see the cool second half coming," said one winemaker. These cooler temperatures persisted throughout the majority of the summer.

One of the hallmarks of the vintage was a large crop which, notably, caught many winemakers and growers by surprise. As a result, many sites picked out heavier than average and expected, despite successive thinning passes.

Most attributed the large crop size to larger than average cluster size. Both berry size and the number of berries were significantly increased.

Several factors were in play to cause this: the warmth of the previous year, the lack of fall or winter freezes, the warm spring, and then cooler summer temperatures. "Everything was set to maximize," one grower reported. As a result of this and additional plantings, 2016 was easily a record crop for the state.

Harvest started early, though not quite as historically early as the previous year. Cooler temperatures in September and October, along with some unseasonable rainfall, stretched the harvest season out to record lengths for some growers, with larger sites not finishing until the first week of November after starting in the third week of August.

Overall, winemakers expected high quality fruit due to the extended hang time, with the larger berry and cluster size.

Indicator	Overview	Detail
Vintage hallmark	--	--
Growing season summary	Warm start and then more average heat accumulation.	2016 started out looking like the warmest vintage on record through May but then temperatures drifted back toward normal for the remainder of the growing season. Cluster and berry size was up, leading to record tonnage in the state.
Bud break	Early	About 14 days ahead of historical averages
Bloom	Early	About 14 days ahead of historical averages
Veraison	Early	About 10 days ahead of historical averages.
Harvest	Early start and late finish	Started early but then stretched out into November in some locations
Berry size/Cluster size	Increased	Larger than average berry size and cluster weights were the hallmark of the vintage.
Yields	Increased	Yields came in significantly above average due to larger cluster sizes
Brix	Average	Cooler temperatures in the second half of the growing season largely kept Brix in check
Acids	Varied	Varied, but generally average
Disease, Pest, and Environmental pressures	Minimal	Minimal