



# **A Practical Guide to Starting a Vineyard in Idaho**

**IDAHO WINE  
COMMISSION**



# Letter from the Executive Director

August 28, 2019

The past 10 years have been a period of immense growth for the Idaho wine industry. Among other developments, we've seen a 58 percent increase in the number of wineries in our state and the approval of two new viticultural growing areas.

At this writing, the state has 60 wineries, more than 70 vineyards, 1,300 acres devoted to wine-grape growing and three American Viticultural Areas (AVAs).

Yet it feels like we are just beginning to tap into our potential.

With a rich agricultural network, superb growing conditions and a supportive community of growers and winemakers, there is tremendous opportunity in Idaho for those looking to establish or expand a vineyard.

If you fall into this category, let me be the first to welcome you. Increasing our production of wine grapes is vital to our continued growth and a priority for the Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission (Idaho Wine Commission).

We recognize that operating a successful vineyard is not for everybody. It requires passion, planning, persistence and patience. Not to mention a lot of hard work.

The Idaho Wine Commission created this guide to identify the various factors to consider before establishing a vineyard in Idaho. These insights are based on the experience of local growers, winemakers and industry consultants. Our goal is to arm you with the information and resources you need to make an informed decision.

If you move forward with your plans, we want to set you up for success and have you become a part of our community. In Idaho, vineyards and winemakers work together as a team and believe that individual success benefits us all.

I invite you to use this guide as your first step into Idaho's wine industry. And remember, the Idaho Wine Commission is here to help you along the way.

Sincerely,

**Moya Shatz Dolsby**  
*Executive Director*  
*Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission*

DISCLAIMER: This document is meant to act only as a guide and general resource in starting your own vineyard. The Idaho Wine Commission disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence that may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.





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# A Brief Introduction to the Idaho Wine Industry

Idaho has a rich history of grape growing and winemaking that continues to evolve. The first wine grapes planted in the Pacific Northwest were in the Lewis-Clark Valley of northern Idaho in the 1860s.

The Idaho wine industry grew steadily from that point until 1917 when statewide prohibition crippled the industry. Two years later, national prohibition had a similar effect on wine grape growers across the country. It took years for the industry to recover.

## Beginning the Recovery

The first signs of recovery in Idaho appeared in 1975 when [Ste. Chapelle Winery](#) began growing grapes and producing wine in what was later designated the Snake River Valley AVA. The vineyard and winery served as an inspiration for other farmers in the region and continues to thrive today.

By 1999, the Idaho Department of Agriculture reported a total of 23 vineyards producing wine grapes, with a total of 656 acres in production. By 2006, the number of vineyards had grown to 49 and the total number of acres in production nearly doubled to 1,214.

## Building on Success

In April 2007, the Snake River Valley region in southwest Idaho was designated an AVA by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. An AVA is defined by the bureau as “a grape-growing region with specific geographic or climatic features that distinguish it from the surrounding regions and affect how grapes are grown.”

With the designation of the Snake River Valley AVA, the Idaho wine industry had come of age. The industry continued to expand steadily.

By 2019, two additional regions in Idaho had been designated as AVAs; the state had 1,300 acres planted, 60 wineries and more than 70 vineyards. This continued growth in wineries and wine production has increased demand for Idaho grapes.

## Facts & Statistics



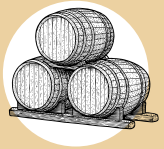
**60**  
**WINERIES**  
*in Idaho*



**1,300**  
**ACRES**  
*planted*



**\$209.6**  
**MILLION**  
*economic impact in 2018*



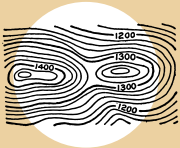
**131,756**  
**BULK GALLONS**  
*produced in 2018*



**160,000**  
**AVERAGE CASES**  
*of wine produced annually*



**2,800**  
**TONS**  
*of grapes harvested in 2018*



**600 - 3,000**  
**FEET**  
*elevation*



**3**  
**AVAs**  
*Snake River Valley, Eagle Foothills, Lewis-Clark Valley*



# Idaho American Viticultural Areas (AVAs)

Idaho’s three AVAs each have their own distinct growing conditions and communities. Following is a snapshot of the three AVAs.



## ■ SNAKE RIVER VALLEY

### SOUTHWESTERN IDAHO WINE REGION

The largest of Idaho’s three viticulture areas is the Snake River Valley AVA. It was established in 2007 and encompasses an area in southwest Idaho extending into Oregon and includes Idaho’s capital, Boise. Leveraging the distinct geological properties from ancient Lake Idaho, the region features a weathered sediment bed and offers a warmer climate that is more conducive to grape growing than surrounding areas that sit at higher elevations. Bordered by mountains and the Boise National Forest, the region has similar annual total growing degree-days as wine-growing regions in Washington state. The AVA covers an area of 8,000 square miles with 1,125 acres planted. Major varietals grown in the area include Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Syrah, Malbec, Viognier and Riesling.



## ■ EAGLE FOOTHILLS

### SOUTHWESTERN IDAHO WINE REGION

Designated an AVA in November 2015, the Eagle Foothills AVA lies entirely within the Snake River Valley AVA, making it the Snake River Valley’s first sub-AVA. This region lies completely within Idaho State boundaries and encompasses nearly 50,000 acres of land outside of Boise. The influence of nearby Prospect Peak contributes to the region’s distinct climate. The soil of Eagle Foothills also differs from surrounding areas, featuring granite pebbles mixed with volcanic ash and sandy loam. Among the varietals that flourish in the Eagle Foothills rocky soil are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Malbec and Tempranillo.



## ■ LEWIS-CLARK VALLEY

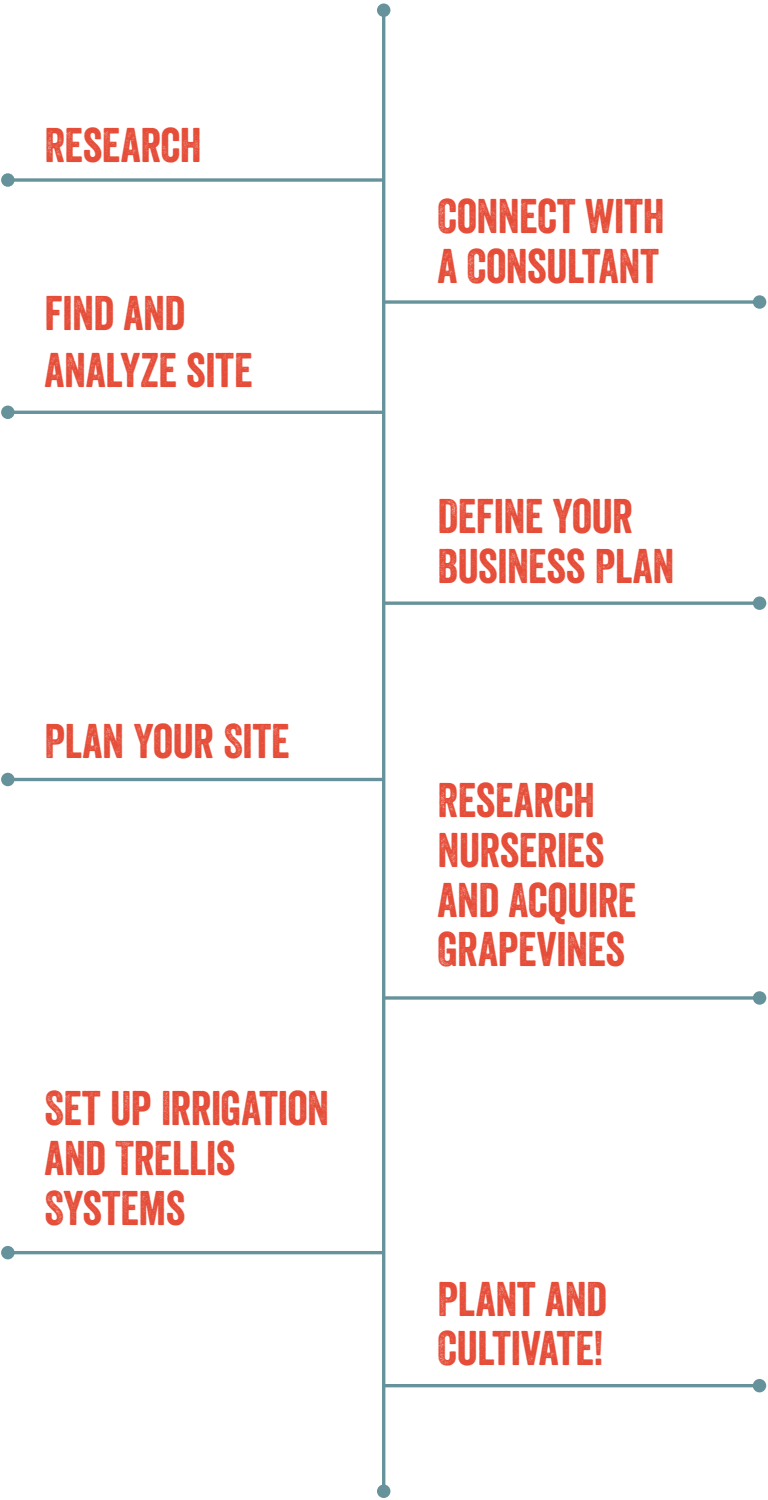
### NORTHERN IDAHO WINE REGION

Idaho’s third AVA, the Lewis-Clark Valley region, which stretches across northern Idaho into Washington, was federally authorized in April 2016. With 72 percent of the AVA residing in Idaho, the region is known as the “banana belt” for its high temperatures compared to surrounding areas. Nestled in the Bitterroot Mountains, the region was a premier grape-growing area in the early 20th century prior to Prohibition and re-emerged in the early 2000s as a grape-growing hotspot. The Lewis-Clark Valley encompasses 479 square miles with 100 vineyard acres currently planted and seven wineries. More than 20 varietals are grown in the region, including reds such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Zinfandel and whites such as Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc.





# How to Start a Vineyard





# Beginning the Journey

The decision to begin growing wine grapes is not one to be taken lightly. Economics have proven favorable for a number of Idaho growers; however, grape growing is a capital- and labor-intensive enterprise that demands passion and commitment.

## There Will Be Math

For those considering starting a vineyard, a general understanding of the financial commitment required is often the first step. A number of factors can influence economics, including the varieties planted, yield per acre, harvest methods, weather or pest-related losses and market prices. As you move forward, you'll be able to refine your calculations as you develop specific plans. But early in the process, it's helpful to get a general sense of the scale of the investment and gain an understanding of market demand, including what nearby vineyards have planted and if there will be enough product to fulfill your region's demand.

We asked Idaho wine-grape growers to evaluate the per-acre costs associated with opening a vineyard. Their estimates averaged between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per acre, not including the cost of land, drilling a well or fence construction. This also does include the cost of irrigation materials and installation, trellis construction, planning and planting. In addition, a small- to medium-sized vineyard will require a tractor and equipment that may include an air-blast sprayer, herbicide sprayer and mower.

If you don't own suitable land, you'll also need to consider land costs. Real-estate prices are dynamic and based on demand but are generally lower in Idaho than other grape-growing regions in the Northwest. Land in Idaho can cost up to \$13,000; while, according to [Wines Vines Analytics](#), cost per acre for Washington and Oregon AVAs can be as high as \$80,000.

On the other side of the ledger is the expected yield per acre. Different varieties have different yields per acre and prices per ton. Typical yields and prices for leading varieties grown within Idaho are shown in the below table.

Varietal	Average Yield per Acre	Market Price per Ton (2019)
Riesling	3-6	\$750-\$1500
Chardonnay	3-6	\$750-\$1500
Pinot Gris	3-5	\$800-\$1200
Cabernet Sauvignon	2.5-4	\$1200-\$2000
Merlot	3-4.5	\$1200-\$2000
Syrah	3-5	\$1200-\$2000

Remember, yields can vary year-to-year due to weather. It can take three to five years for a vineyard to mature and produce full yields. On the positive side, grapevines have an expected productive life of more than 30 years.



## COLTER'S CREEK WINERY AND VINEYARD

Nestled along the Potlatch and Clearwater rivers in the Lewis-Clark AVA, [Colter's Creek Winery and Vineyard](#) traces its roots to 2007 when Melissa Sanborn and Mike Pearson purchased an abandoned vineyard. Today, the thriving vineyard has 30 acres of vine, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Sangiovese, Tempranillo, Graciano, Negro Amaro, Chardonnay, Riesling, Viognier, Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre and Cinsault.

Melissa, who studied wine chemistry and sensory science at Washington State University, emphasizes the importance of locally grown grapes to the success of Idaho wineries. "A wine region is developed by its vineyards, not by its wineries," she says. "Customers want to drink what is grown where they are standing."

Attracted to the industry by a love for wine and growing, Melissa encourages new growers against trying to do too much, too soon. "Don't plant too many varieties at the beginning. Focus on what will grow best in your soil and climate. You can always experiment with other varieties once you become established."



# Converting from Existing Crops

If you are already farming in an area suitable for wine-grape growing, you're a step ahead. You likely have land, water rights, agricultural experience, existing crops and some of the basic equipment you will need.

In that case, conversion costs may be limited to site preparation and planting, acquiring vines and the trellis and irrigation system. For unused acreage, consider the following question: What will be the expected return on the above investment on a per-acre basis, including the labor to support additional crops?

If you're converting existing crops, you must consider the difference between the current return on the crops now growing compared to the expected return on wine grapes. For example, Richard Benear of [Meadowlark Hills Vineyard](#) converted his existing hay crop to wine grapes after evaluating the reduced water requirements and higher value per acre of the latter. You can read more about Richard's story in the sidebar.

## Will it be worth it for you?

That will depend on your individual financial calculations. You know exactly what price you're getting for the crops you're considering converting and your interest in wine. Wine-grape growing isn't for everybody, but for those attracted to it, it can be rewarding, both financially and personally.

## Knowing the Market

Idaho's wine culture is cooperative, collaborative and supportive in nature. As you join the industry, establishing relationships in the community will be a valuable part of your journey. Once you've done the basic economic calculations, it's time to get a sense for what type of market is available for your crop. Visit area wineries to get an idea of what varieties and attributes are in demand. Learn whether wineries are having trouble meeting demand and discover desired varieties and current prices.



## MEADOWLARK HILLS VINEYARD

[Meadowlark Hills Vineyard](#) is located in the Eagle Foothills AVA in Eagle, Idaho. The one-acre vineyard was established in 2010 by Richard Benear and today grows Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Petite Syrah, Malbec and Tempranillo.

"I wanted to utilize the land for something other than hay," Richard says. "I've always enjoyed wine, and grapes use far less water and provide more value per acre than hay. It was a natural transition for me and has been very rewarding."

Richard considers Idaho a largely undiscovered wine-grape producing region and appreciates the entrepreneurial nature of the Idaho wine community.

He also advises aspiring grape growers to do their research. "Do a site analysis for soils, slope and microclimate. Then, use one of the tools available online to do a cost analysis." He also advises growers to set realistic expectations. "Typical break-even is six years, so you have to be patient."



# Converting from Existing Crops

## Buy Local

Teresa Moya is the general manager at [Fujishin Family Cellars](#) and [Lost West Winery](#) in Idaho's Snake River Valley AVA. In addition to Fujishin's flagship Amantino and Viognier wines, it produces a number of lesser-known wines, such as Mourvedre and Petit Verdot, using locally grown grapes.

"Having access to in-state grapes contributes to the success of a local winery," says Teresa. "There are economic benefits, including lower transportation costs. More importantly, the local factor resonates with consumers near and far.

"Successful relationships usually result from a collaborative partnership between grape buyers and growers," Teresa says. "Growers need to understand what their buyer needs, but buyers also need an understanding of the economics of grape growing. If they need certain grapes grown in a specified way, they should understand the economic impact of those specifications."

Earl Sullivan, owner and winemaker at [Telaya Wine Company](#), agrees. "There is definitely a 'buy local' mindset in Idaho," Earl says. "With high-quality local fruit, we can make a big statement as a winery. It's important to me that growers want to have pride in the product I make, not just in getting fruit to me."

## Connecting with a Consultant

If you've considered the investment, confirmed the market and are ready to move forward, it may be time to engage with a vineyard consultant.

These wine industry experts help growers with site selection, vineyard development and promotion. Their expertise and insight can be valuable in helping growers make the decisions that increase their likelihood of success.

These advisors are also hired by established wineries to analyze the terroir of their vineyard and the quality of grapes and advise the winery on how to improve. This perspective is extremely beneficial to those beginning to grow grapes in Idaho.

Whether you are an experienced farmer with existing land or completely new to growing, a vineyard consultant can guide you through the startup process into the second or third vintage. A list of consultants who understand the Idaho growing environment and market is provided in the [Resources section on pages 18-19](#).



## LINDSAY CREEK VINEYARDS

After touring wineries for years, brothers Doug and Art McIntosh and their wives Brenda and Michelle decided to fulfill their dream of opening their own vineyard. In 2007, the families founded [Lindsay Creek Vineyards](#) and planted their first crop of 150 vines, mostly Bordeaux. Today they have 11 acres planted and grow Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot, Durif, Riesling, Chardonnay, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc.

As fourth-generation grain farmers in Lewiston, Idaho, the brothers had a deep appreciation for the region that later became the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA. According to Doug, "The sediment deposits from the great floods of Lake Missoula millennia ago left us with a fertile soil that offers the composition and drainage that grape vines love."

Despite their agricultural experience, the brothers knew that grape growing required an expertise they didn't have. They consulted with industry experts and both returned to school after starting the vineyard, with Art studying winemaking and Doug studying viticulture.

"We knew what we didn't know," Doug says, "And we didn't hesitate to bring in experts as we needed them."

Doug's advice to new growers is "identify your labor pool early in the process. If you wait until you need help to start looking, it will be too late."



# Finding a Site

The single most important decision you'll make in starting a vineyard is finding the right site. Some real estate agents specialize in agricultural properties and are connected with other industry professionals to help determine site quality and value. A list of real estate agents with experience in Idaho's agricultural community is provided in the [Resources section on pages 18-19](#).

There are a few key considerations that you should evaluate when determining an appropriate site for your vineyard, including **grape-growing potential, weather data, water rights and soil quality**.

## Understanding Grape-Growing Potential

While wine-grape growing within Idaho is not limited to AVAs, purchasing a site within either the Snake River Valley AVA, the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA or the Eagle Foothills AVA will give the grapes grown an automatic credential associated with that distinctive wine growing region.

You also need to plant the right varietal in the right location to ensure the grapes reach their full growing potential. The [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) hardiness zone map](#) is a simplified tool that will help you determine which varieties will be best for your region based on your ZIP code. You can also ask a vineyard consultant to provide recommendations on which varieties will thrive in your location. Later on in this section, we'll also cover weather data research methods, which will help determine if your vineyard may have special microclimates or spring frost hazards to consider. Placing the right vine in the right place will lead to a healthier root system and lessen the chance for disease.

## Analyzing Weather Data

We recommend reviewing a full year of weather data before finalizing your site selection. The [Watchdog Weather Station](#) is used by many Idaho grape growers because of its reliable and accurate weather data collection. [The United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation](#) also has weather stations that may work for some potential growers who live near one of these locations. A vineyard consultant can help you use this data, along with soil information, to determine the varietals that will grow best on the site you are considering.





## Analyzing Water and Securing Rights

Ensuring water rights for irrigation is a critical step in the site selection process. Water rights are defined by the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) as “authorization to use water in a prescribed manner, not to own the water itself. Without diversion and beneficial use, there is no water right.”

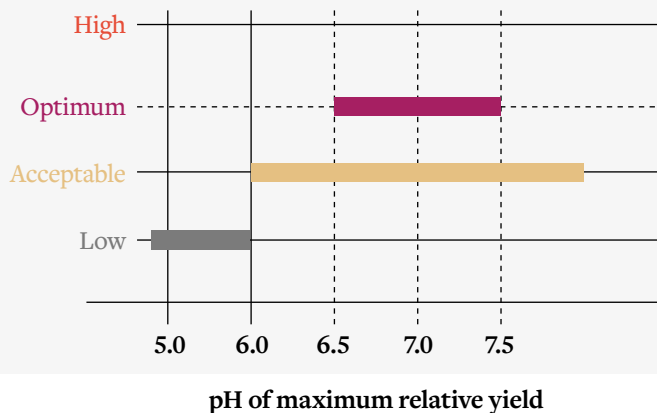
Was water put to beneficial use on your site within five years before you purchased it? If so, you may already have legal water rights in the state of Idaho. If there is no existing water right, file an application with the [IDWR](#). Before applying, determine if you need surface-water rights or groundwater rights. **Surface water** is water from a stream, river, wetland or lake. **Groundwater** can be extracted through a manufactured well on the site or naturally released into streams or wetlands. Idaho AVAs generally have access to abundant water resources due to the healthy rivers that run through them. Water quality can also affect vine growth and health. You should conduct a water test to analyze your water source’s physical, biological and chemical properties.

## Testing Soil Quality

An initial soil test is recommended prior to making the final decision on your site. An in-depth soil test will also be required once the site is purchased and water rights are secured. See the section [Becoming a Successful Grower on page 16-17](#) for more on regular soil testing.

Grapes require well-drained, highly aerated soil that is preferably four to six feet deep, but at least two feet deep. Deep sandy loam with some gravel is recommended. Rocky soil is better than clay, although some clay soils are acceptable. Optimum soil pH is 6.5-7.5; acceptable soil pH is 6.0-8.0. Soils below 6.0 may require incorporating high volumes of lime before planting. Those above 8.0 have problems utilizing iron and zinc and have the potential for developing cotton root rot, one of the most destructive fungal plant organisms. Wine grapes can be grown outside the acceptable range but will require additional soil amendments. To find out what kind of soil you’re working with, you can use the [USDA Web Soil Survey tool](#), which provides data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey.

## SOIL TEST



## How to Conduct a Soil Test

While this is dramatically simplified, to test the soil at a prospective site you’ll need a soil probe, trowel or spade, a clean plastic pail, sample bags or boxes and a map of the proposed vineyard. Choose several areas of the vineyard with similar texture and slope and test in a zig-zag pattern across the site, avoiding the ends of rows and edges of the field as these are not accurate representations of the majority of soil. It’s recommended to dig several deep pits to test soil. A professional analysis of the soil can be done through companies such as [Cascade Analytical](#), [Wilson Orchard & Vineyard Supply](#) and [Bleyhls Farm Service](#). It’s a good idea to do a water test at the same time as your soil test, which can often be analyzed through the same laboratory.

You should conduct an in-depth soil test after purchase and six months prior to planting to ensure the soil has the necessary nutrients. Continue to test soil every two to three years as your vineyard matures, unless larger amounts of amendments have been applied. Tissue and water samples should be taken on annual basis. Spring is an ideal time for a soil test because the pH is much higher at that time of year. To more easily compare pH levels and soil matter with previous tests, test the soil at the same time each year.

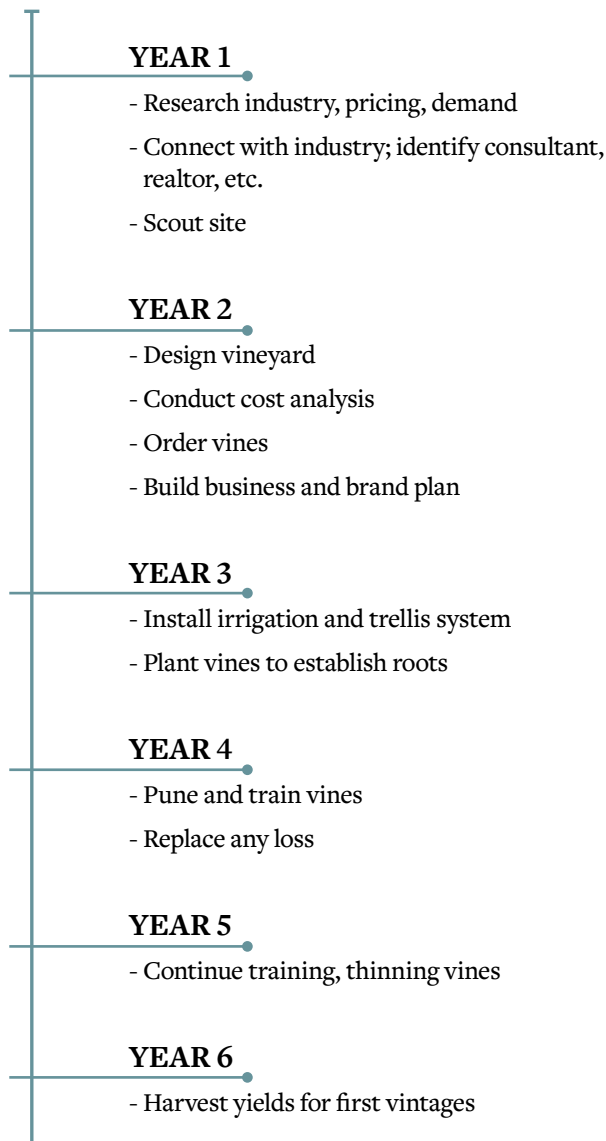


## Refining Your Calculations

Once you've identified a potential site and have an understanding of the varieties that will thrive in your soil and climate, you have what you need to develop a detailed financial analysis for your vineyard.

Using a wine calculator, such as this one from [Northwest Grapes](#), can help determine the cost of producing grapes on your selected site. This particular tool has a four-year planning function, which is important since grape vines take three to five years to mature. Again, a vineyard consultant can assist with this process.

Keep in mind the following timeline, which outlines a standard vineyard start-up timeframe, when conducting your financial planning:



## SCORIA VINEYARD

Sydney Weitz-Nederend represents the new generation of growers tapping the potential of Idaho's grape-growing areas. Her [SCORIA Vineyard](#) sits along an extinct volcanic vent in the Snake River Valley AVA. In fact, Sydney took the name from the volcanic rock that gives the soil the ideal drainage for grape growing.

Following her first planting in 2014 at the age of 20, she continued to expand and, today, has 18 acres planted, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec.

Sydney has found a reflection of herself in the Idaho wine community. "It's unique in that it's so young and experimental," she says. "There are also a lot of female winemakers which adds to the sense of camaraderie and community."

For Sydney, location is everything, and her advice to new growers is to "only plant a vineyard if you have the proper elevation and aspect."

She also notes that Idaho is a good place to find the right location. "Unlike some other regions, there are still good vineyard sites available here."



# Planning Your Site

Once costs are calculated, the soil and water are tested, weather data is collected and you've purchased your site, it's time to design your vineyard.

Studying topography and weather data will be helpful in mapping out surface water flow. The amount of surface water in your area will also determine your irrigation needs. Irrigation is something to plan for in most Idaho AVAs since precipitation is unpredictable year-to-year.

Much of the design process will be driven by the irrigation system. Each grape varietal will need its own zone for growing. They all have different needs in terms of water intake, sunlight and growing time.

To begin, determine your grape-growing areas and row orientation based on the topography and sunlight on your land. There should be sufficient space, called headlands, at the beginning and end of each row to make maneuvering easy for tractors. The recommended minimum for these headlands is 30 feet. You should also plan to include alleyways, or systematic breaks, within your rows to help with maneuverability. Don't forget to identify and map out roadways throughout the vineyard. These should be wide enough to accommodate a semi-truck.

Next, determine your row length. There is no limit to your row length, but you'll want to consider vine spacing and efficiency of harvest. If you have chosen longer rows, alleyways in the rows will increase efficiency. Typically, growers plant grapevines five to eight feet apart in rows that are eight to 10 feet apart, although some growers opt for higher density. Spacing is also influenced by how you plan to harvest (hand-pick or mechanized) and the slope of the land.

Lastly, determine your vine count. There is no right formula to map out the perfect vine count and spacing, but looking at historical data from other growers in your AVA will help. Mapping the vine count ahead of time will be a good reminder to order grapes at least one year in advance of planting season.



## INDIAN CREEK WINERY AND STOWE VINEYARD

Mike McClure and Tammy Stowe-McClure operate the [Indian Creek Winery](#) and [Estate Stowe Vineyard](#) in Idaho's Snake River Valley AVA. Planted in 1982 by Tammy's parents, the family owned and operated vineyard is one of the oldest in the state and produces Pinot Noir, Tempranillo, Malbec, Moscato, Riesling and Chardonnay.

Mike, who has worked in the vineyards since college, appreciates the pioneer spirit of the Idaho wine community. "We are a young industry that is continuing to explore how to express the unique soil and climate of our area in high-quality fruit distinctive to Idaho," he says.

When counseling new growers, Mike encourages them to consider the economics of growing. "It takes almost the same amount of equipment, time and energy to plant and farm one acre as it does 50 acres," he advises. "Leveraging those economies of scale can be crucial to success."



# Defining a Brand and Business Plan

In the wine industry, branding can be a key contributor to the success of a vineyard. Growers who establish a reputation for producing distinct and high-quality grapes can command a premium for their crops. The grower's brand helps build that reputation.

## Creating a Brand

Now it's time to build an organized, comprehensive business plan. Not only will this plan be the roadmap to your future success as an Idaho grape grower, but banks and financial institutions will be more inclined to finance your vineyard when you've thought through and documented your plan.

There are a number of good books available on developing a business plan. If you've never written a plan like this before, here are some of the key components that should be included:

- The story of your vineyard business, including information about the land, capital, ideas and future plans.
- A persuasive description of your plan for success and your tactics to achieve that success in no more than one page. This will serve as an executive summary.
- An explanation of the products and services you plan to provide your customers.
- An assessment of the current grape and wine market in your area.

Above all, make a case for your business. Remember that Idaho needs more grapes in the ground to keep the industry thriving at the rate it has been for the last 10 years. You and your grapes would be a huge contribution to this upward momentum.





## Creating a Business Plan

Your brand succinctly captures the story you want to tell. Does your land have a special history? Do you want to grow conventional, organic or biodynamic grapes? Do you want your grapes reserved for vegan wine? Your aspirations for your vineyard should be reflected in your brand.

Connect with wineries in your area before you develop your brand and business plan. You may have already established some connections with wineries during your initial investigations. Now it's time to go to the wineries you hope to serve as an actual grower. You'll likely have different and more specific questions based on the research you've done and plans you've made since your last visit. You may find they are able to source adequate quantities of certain varietals locally but are seeking sources for other varietals. The collaborative spirit is a characteristic of the Idaho wine industry that you should tap into.

During your visit, pay attention to their brands and how they position themselves to their customers. Do they cater to connoisseurs or casual wine drinkers? Is their atmosphere formal or relaxed? What do they expect from a grower? You don't necessarily want to tailor your brand to what they are doing—as much as possible stay true to your vision—but it will give you more insight into how the brand comes to life in everything from signage to tasting-room design.





# Becoming a Successful Grower

You've done everything right up to this point. You have a fertile site in the right climate, identified the varieties you'll grow and a site design. Now the work really starts.

## Acquiring Grapevines

One of the first things to do after securing your site and finalizing your plan is to order grapevines. This should be done about two years prior to planting. All Idaho vines are self-rooted, meaning they have their own roots and are not grafted. It is crucial to purchase certified clean root stock.

A grower can purchase the rootstock from specialized nurseries such as [Inland Desert](#) and [Skagit Horticulture](#). The rootstock can have a significant long-term impact on the productivity, efficiency and profitability of a vineyard. A vineyard consultant can help you navigate issues with vine selection and acquisition, such as certification requirements, pest and disease tolerance, and soil and climate compatibility.

## Trellises and Irrigation

Once the site design is finalized and soil has been tested, make sure your irrigation system is in place. You want to have your irrigation designed by a specialist familiar with wine-grapes such as [Aqua Irrigation](#), [Pipeco](#) and [Wilson Orchard & Vineyard Supply](#). The specialist can determine if you need a traditional vertical shoot position (VSP) or a non-traditional design like a Geneva Double Curtain system that could help with sun management.

At this stage, assuming you're using a traditional VSP, you'll also want to install T-stakes and end posts in your rows. This will soon form your trellis system for the grapes to grow and thrive on.



## ROCK SPUR VINEYARD

[Rock Spur Vineyard](#) is operated by Jenell Kasper and her father Tom. The vineyard was started in 2017 on unused acreage on the family dairy farm that is now planted with Merlot, Malbec and Tempranillo grapes.

“We took a piece of land that has never been farmed before and are making it productive with wine grapes,” says Jenell.

Coming from an agricultural background, Jenell had an affinity for growing. Once she got involved in viticulture, she was hooked. After taking viticulture courses in college, she knew it was the direction she wanted to go in agriculture.

She cautions new growers that getting started can be difficult. “I have an ag background and I still thought it was difficult trying to figure out how to build a trellis and actually set up the vineyard on my own,” she says. “I learned a lot by connecting with a consultant.”

While the process was challenging, she found the conditions for grape growing in the Snake River Valley AVA to be ideal. “The soil and weather are perfect for growing grapes,” she says. “We have a lot of good growing days and diurnal temperatures that contribute to ripe fruit with the right amount of acidity. We are excited to be part of the Idaho wine community and committed to producing the highest-quality fruit.”



# Becoming a Successful Grower

## Planting and Cultivating

Now you are ready to plant. Plant your bare root vines between late April and early June. Fertilize and cover the bare root vines with enough soil to protect them from sun damage and snow.

Your main goal in the first year is to establish roots. Light pruning is recommended to establish a vine framework but don't try to train the vines in this year. They should be allowed to grow freely. Leave all foliage on the vine to feed the roots. Place grow tubes among vines in your rows to promote growth, and to protect from animals and wind damage.

Prune your vines the following year in late dormancy (March). Green tying and training of the vines begins at this stage and should occur approximately three times from May through July, depending on how the vines grew the first year. You should begin to see small amounts of fruit during the second year. However, you may need to replace approximately five percent of the roots the second year after planting due to natural losses.

Full yields can begin three years after establishing roots, but more so in year four or five. The third year is the last the vines will be trained as they were in year two. Consider fruit thinning in year three to lighten the vine's load in the establishment years.

By working with a vineyard consultant and other growers throughout this process, you can develop the skills and experience you need to become a successful grower and an important part of the Idaho wine community.





# Resources

## The Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission

The Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission, also known as the Idaho Wine Commission, supports Idaho's grape growers and winemakers. It is the united voice for the Idaho wine industry, helping to grow awareness and sales of Idaho wines. Idaho's high-quality wines are an important part of Idaho's economy. Contact the Commission by email, phone or visiting in person.

821 W. State St. Boise, ID 83702 Phone: 208.332.1538 Email: [info@idahowines.org](mailto:info@idahowines.org)

## Vineyard Consultants

**Alan Busacca, [Vinitas Consultants, LLC](#)**

(509) 592-0756  
[alan@vinitas.net](mailto:alan@vinitas.net)

Alan has more than 40 years of professional experience as a soil scientist and agronomist and also 20 years in vineyard development for fine wines. He has a special expertise in evaluating land for different uses and diagnosing soil and site-related management problems. As a consultant, he helps clients to realize their dreams to evaluate land suitability for vineyards and to develop vineyards for exceptional wines. He is in his 12th year of owning a vineyard in the Columbia Gorge AVA of Oregon, Windhorse Vineyard.

**Jake Cragin, [Winemakers LLC](#)**

(208) 401-5899  
[Jake@winemakersllc.com](mailto:Jake@winemakersllc.com)

Jake started his journey in the wine industry in 2010, working on viticulture research with Dr. Krista Shellie of the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. Soon thereafter, he moved to Washington to further his education and experience. After returning home to Idaho, Jake works as a viticulturist and vineyard manager for Winemakers LLC properties, which include Sawtooth and Skyline Vineyards. He is a commissioner on the Idaho Wine Commission and consults with local growers to improve their farming efficiencies, production and wine quality.

**Mike Williamson, [Williamson Vineyards](#)**

(208) 573-6931  
[mikew@willorch.com](mailto:mikew@willorch.com)

Mike is a fourth-generation Idaho fruit grower and grew up working and playing in his family's fruit orchards on the Sunny Slope in southwestern Idaho. He received a degree in Agricultural Science and Technologies from the University of Idaho. Mike and the Williamson family planted their first vineyards in 1998 and are now farming over 80 acres of wine grapes and tree fruits. The Williamsons' grapes go into their own wine, as well as numerous wineries across and outside the state. Mike has served on the Idaho Cherry Commission, the Idaho Horticultural Association and the Idaho-Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association. Mike brings to the wine industry a legacy and a passion for growing quality fruit in Idaho. He hopes to help the Idaho wine industry continue to grow high-quality grapes and make award-winning wine.

**Tony Domingos, [TD Farming](#)**

(805) 227-4682  
[tony@tdfarming.com](mailto:tony@tdfarming.com)

Tony Domingos is a vineyard manager, consultant and educator available for services to members of the Idaho Wine Commission. A native of Santa Maria Valley, California, and fourth-generation farmer, Tony worked on his grandfather's dairy farm, farming forage crops, corn and vegetables starting at 12 years of age. He graduated in 1992 with an agriculture business management degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a concentration in farm and ranch management and a minor in plant protection. After graduation, he worked as a viticulturist and pest control manager for Hampton Farming Company in Santa Barbara, California, where he oversaw more than 5,000 acres of Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Chenin Blanc and Gewürztraminer. He also managed 700-acre Meridian Home Vineyard. In 2005, he started Tony Domingos Farming, Inc., which provides management services for vineyard owners. He also has two vineyards of his own in Paso Robles, California. He has served as a board member on the California Association of Winegrowers and the Pas Robles Wine Country Alliance. In 2009, he was honored as San Luis Obispo County's "Wine Grape Grower of the Year."

## Agriculture Real Estate Agents:

**Knipe Land Company (Central and Southern Idaho)**

[knipeland.com](http://knipeland.com)  
(208)-345-3163

**Western Idaho Idaho Farm and Home Realty**

[idahofarmandhome.com](http://idahofarmandhome.com)  
(208) 453-8787

**Western Idaho Realty**

[westernidahorealty.com](http://westernidahorealty.com)  
(208) 340-7025



# Idaho Vineyards and Wineries

The number of Idaho wineries has increased by 58 percent in the last decade. This list is as of September 2019 and is subject to change. Please visit [IdahoWines.org/Wine](http://IdahoWines.org/Wine) for a comprehensive list.

- 3 Horse Ranch Vineyards
- 3100 Cellars
- Bankhead Vineyard
- Beauty Bay Winery
- Bitner Vineyards / Rose Cottage LLC / Polo Cove
- Bruneau Valley Vineyards
- Camas Prairie Winery
- Cellar No. 616
- Cinder
- Clearwater Canyon Cellars / Umiker Vineyard
- Coeur d'Alene Cellars
- Coiled Wines
- Cold Springs Winery
- Colter's Creek Winery
- Digiacomo Vineyards
- Dude DeWald Cellars
- Emerald Slopes Vineyard
- Famici Wine Co.
- Fargo Farms
- Feathered Winds Wine
- Finca Besada
- Frenchman's Gulch
- Fujishin Family Cellars / Lost West Winery
- HAT Ranch Winery
- Hells Canyon Winery / Zhoo Zhoo
- Holesinsky Winery
- Huston Vineyards
- Indian Creek Winery
- J Victor Vineyards
- Jovinea Cellars
- Kerry Hill Winery / Vigneto Albero Verde
- Koenig Vineyards
- Lindsay Creek Vineyard
- Mandeville Vineyards
- Meadowlark Hills Vineyard
- Par Terre Winery
- Mouvance Winery
- Parma Ridge
- Pasculli Vineyard
- Pend d'Oreille Winery
- Potter Wines
- Rivaura Estate Vineyards & Winery
- Rock Spur Vineyards & Winery
- Sandstone Vineyards
- Sawtooth Winery
- SCORIA Vineyards
- Sheppard Fruit Wines
- Skyline Vineyards / Winemakers, LLC
- Small House Winery
- Snake River Winery / Arena Valley Vineyards LLC
- Snyder Winery
- SOL Invictus Vineyard
- Spiral Rock Vineyard
- Split Rail Winery
- Ste. Chapelle Winery
- Sweetbriar Winery
- Syringa Winery
- Tammany View Winery / 2 Bad Labs Vineyard
- Telaya Wine Co.
- Terra Nativa Vineyards
- Vale Wine Company
- Veer Wine Project
- Vickers Vineyards
- Villa Mori Vineyard
- Vine46
- Vizcaya Winery / Windy Ridge Estate
- W2
- West Foothills TIC
- Weston Winery
- Williamson Orchard and Vineyard / JR Farms
- Wood Vineyards
- Y Knot Winery



**IDAHO WINE**  
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**#IdahoWines** | [IdahoWines.org](http://IdahoWines.org)  
821 W. State Street, Boise, Idaho 83702



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