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## "Grow Wine Grapes for Fun and Profit" Article

Bonnie Riggs  
*Ruralite*

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*Wine making and wine grape growing has a long and imperfectly told history in the Pacific Northwest. The first roots, says Don McKinnis of the Oregon State Department of Agriculture, were transported into the territory by covered wagon in 1847 and planted near Milwaukie, Oregon in 1848.*

*Ruralite has run across vineyards in the Yakima and Mid-Columbia valleys, in the Willamette valley and in western Idaho.*

*Following prohibition repeal there was an upsurge along the Yakima. And now a new enthusiasm and movement has appeared in Douglas county Oregon. Typical of the new vintners are Paul and Mary Bjelland. But let Ruralite's Bonnie Riggs tell their story:*



STORY OF THE MONTH  
from  
Douglas Electric Co-op  
Roseburg, Oregon

## Grow wine grapes for fun and profit

The wine industry has found a new home in Douglas county, Oregon. Our weather, terrain and soil seem to be just what grapes need to grow into just what the makers of fine wines need. Ruralite would like to report a few facts and figures on grape growing in case you have some idle land that could be put into vineyards. The industry here is still young with a potential that really has no limits. Douglas Electric (Roseburg, Oregon) member Paul Bjelland (pronounced B'yelland) believes "we are on our way toward a \$25 million industry."

This winter we visited Paul and Mary Bjelland at their home on Reston road two miles north of Tenmile, Oregon to learn more about their vineyards and wine making operations. The Bjelland's picturesque 200 acres include 28 acres already planted in vinifera (European) varieties of grapes.

These grapes, mainly Cabernet Sauvignon, are grown in few places other than California. Several other Oregon wineries use fruit or native American concord grapes, none of which produce such quality dry table wines as the European grape varieties. Paul Bjelland, enthusiastic as he is over the vineyard potential in this area, is quick to point out "there's a lot of hard work involved — and you have to plan at least a year ahead of time." He explained that after obtaining your cuttings (14" long), you put them in moist sand or soil for

six weeks to callous or harden them off. When the shoots actually start, you put them in a nursery (Dillard commercial nursery, for instance) for a year. Here the plants are spaced four inches apart and watered periodically all summer.

After a year of growth, there will be about 24 inches on top and about 20 inches of root. You trim these to workable plant size, leaving a few buds on top, and they are ready to be set into the ground that you have ready for them early in the spring. This entails plowing, then discing the soil several times, and finally running a subsoiler, a big tooth that goes down 24 inches, along the rows which are spaced 12 feet apart. (Of side interest here is that Tom Hutton of Melrose, Oregon invented the subsoiler used in the local vineyards.) One person goes along a row with a hand shovel and every eight feet digs it into the ground, making a groove in which the plant is inserted by another person following him. Paul told us, "I employ about eight kids to help with the planting every spring vacation." Mary added, "We work like mad from very early to very late to get everything done — then we just fall apart!"

The above is just the beginning. The vines have yet to be strung up on stakes, then in October the grapes are harvested by hand, the wines made and put into oak casks. Meanwhile, the vines cut down and pruned to be ready for the next year.