

The permanent sod cover between rows is most commonly used in West Virginia vineyards. A shallow rooted grass species such as bluegrass is generally recommended because it does not compete as severely as tall fescue, timothy, and other deep-rooted vigorous grasses. Along with cultivation beneath the trellis, a three to four foot herbicide-treated strip is generally maintained.

Mulching grapevines, while not an established practice, is being used as a soil management practice. Mulches: (1) suppress weed growth thus decreasing competition for moisture and nutrients; (2) conserve soil moisture and increase rainfall infiltration; (3) decrease annual nitrogen applications; (4) reduce nutrient applications because of organic breakdown providing some nutrient needs; (5) reduce herbicide applications. Mulching is generally not recommended on heavy soils as excess soil moisture may become a problem. Straw, hay, corn cobs, wood chips, and sawdust are suitable for mulching vineyards. Approximately 1 ton of straw is needed to mulch 1 acre of vineyard 1 inch deep.

Grapes will obviously produce better on deep, fertile soils, however, these soil types are not essential. Proper fertilization, organic matter incorporation, and soil management methods can improve low fertility soils and make them capable of producing economically acceptable grape yields. Therefore, site selection should take into account not only soil fertility but more importantly soil and air drainage.

For further information, see WVU Circular 117, "Growing Grapes in West Virginia", available from your WVU County Extension Office or call Dr. Richard Zimmerman at 293-4801.