

To be frosted or not, that's the question. This cold spring has strained the nerves of England's 500 vineyard owners to breaking point. One sharp frost once the bud has burst, and it's sayonara to two-thirds of the crop.

Much easier to lose a crop it seems than to get rid of an unelected Labour Prime Minister. Desperate e-mails among the vinegrowing community have variously suggested:

- frost busting air blowers (far too expensive)
- bonfires (general conclusion – they would do more harm than good
- spraying water onto the vines in the early hours of the morning

In the end of course most of settled for an early rise at 5am to check the morning temperature. It seems the South West has just about got away with it – not so many in the South East, especially the Thames Valley. Yet another illustration of how important it is to pick the right site, with good frost drainage down the hill.

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Some really good news to report following the so-called “ British wine” fiasco last time I wrote. Mole Valley Farmers have withdrawn the product in question – “ Three Mills British wine”, having accepted that something made out of imported grape concentrate should not be marketed as “ British “...especially when the label nowhere mentions this particularly important item of information. Mole Valley is now encouraging its stores to stock the excellent wines made by Sharpham Vineyard in Totnes and by our good friends Tim and Simon Boyce at Manstree Vineyard in Exeter. Well done Mole Valley.

If you still want to buy imported grape concentrate wine masquerading as British then you will have to go to Tesco's.

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Now – have you thought about starting your own micro-vineyard? All you need for a supply of good weekend drinking is a sunny sheltered spot (not prone to frost!) about 50 vines and a bit of knowhow. In the Mosel, at the same latitude as us, everyone is at it – with vines in every corner of a garden right up to the front door. It's a lot easier than you might imagine, – and if you want to have a go why not come along to our Micro-Vineyard course at Yearlstone on June 5. It's just one of the events all over Devon during the Fifth Devon Wine Week. 14 vineyards are taking part and a host of pubs and restaurants are putting on Wine Week menus (Toucan Cafe Bampton, Cadeleigh Arms, Charlotte's Kitchen to name a few nearby). Most of the vineyards have the 2009 wines on release for the Wine Week – so pop along and I don't think you'll be disappointed – the 2009's are probably the best wines since 2005.

Next time I'll be reporting on the outcome of the Second Wine Challenge too – Master of Wine Alastair Peebles is chairing a competitive tasting of Devon's roses against the roses of the Loire. It's happening at the Devon Wine School in Cheriton Fitzpaine . The full programme of events can be found at www.devonwineweek.co.uk

By then the sun will be shining, the vineyards will be in almost full leaf -and a few sips will make you forget all about elections! At least until the next one in – oh – about 12 months' time most likely.