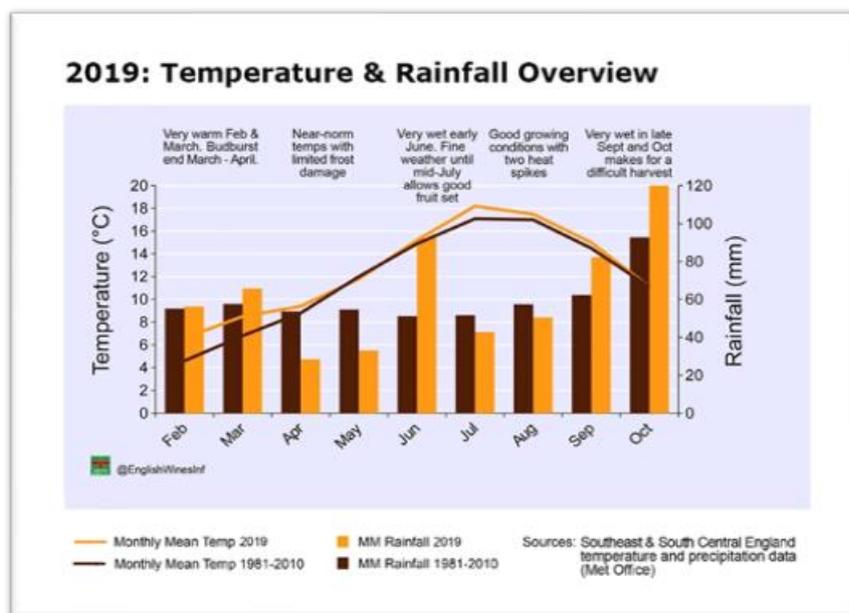


## Harvest Report for Great Britain – 2019 <sup>1</sup>

### Weather conditions for the year

2019 started without much in the way of ice and snow and February was warmer than usual (warmest February since 1910) with a few days of 20°C, a record temperature, towards the end of the month. March continued to be warm (1.7°C above the LTA<sup>2</sup> for South-East and South-Central England) and between the middle and end of March, many growers reported budburst on Chardonnay and other varieties. Inevitably, spring frost followed and there were several reports of damage in the first half of April. Towards the end of April, the south east recorded days of 25°C and good weather continued throughout most of May. Rainfall over



the whole of England in May was 75 per cent less than the LTA but significantly less than that in the east and south. The first three weeks of June however, were a different matter with wind and heavy rain in much of the south of the country which set things back, although

flowering of some early varieties did start around 20 June. There were several reports of Chardonnay and Pinot noir flowering between 22 June and the end of the month, helped by the hottest June day ever recorded, 34°C, on 29 June at Heathrow and Northolt<sup>3</sup>. Flowering continued during a mainly dry and roof-less Wimbledon (roof-less at least for rain – it was used because the players were too hot!) and by the end of the two-week tournament (14 July) flowering was pretty much over and grapes were starting to swell. It was generally agreed that the season was about 'on time', neither early nor late. In comparison to 2018 however, flowering was about 10 days later. The weather during flowering alternated between sunshine and showers and many growers reported Early Bunch Stem Necrosis (EBSN) and/or *coulure*

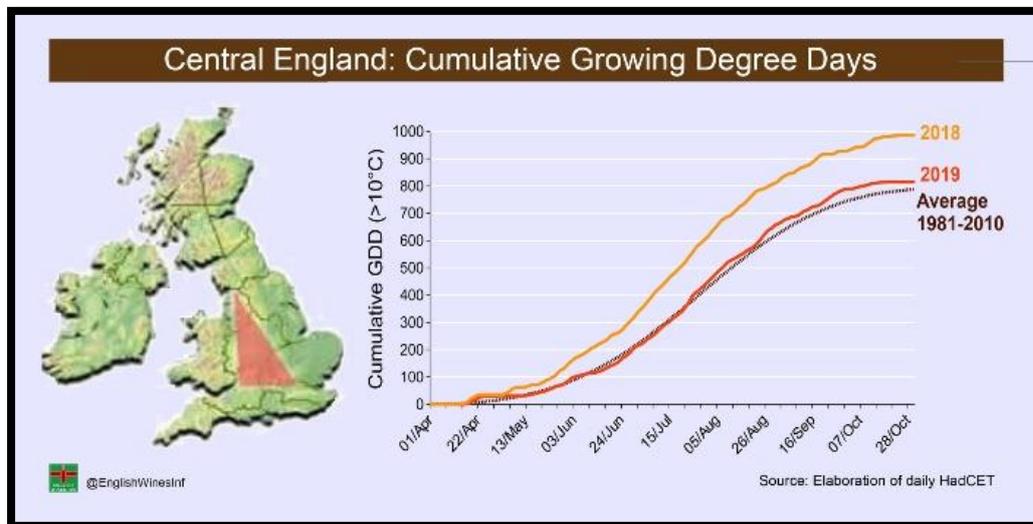
<sup>1</sup> This report has been produced with help on the weather data from Tony Eva, [www.englishwine.info](http://www.englishwine.info)

<sup>2</sup> Long Term Average (LTA) period is 1981-2010.

<sup>3</sup> Heathrow and Northolt, both being airport weather stations, tend to record slightly higher temperatures than open ground nearby as they are surrounded by heat-retaining concrete.

with a marked preponderance for caps to hang on during and after flowering and refused to be dislodged. This seemed quite marked on Bacchus and Pinot noir and was undoubtedly a contributory factor in the incidence of *Botrytis* later in the season.

The end of July was blessed with some scorching weather with the UK's all-time highest temperature of 38.7 °C being recorded on July 25<sup>th</sup> in the Cambridge Botanic Garden, knocking Faversham in Kent's 38.5°C record into 2<sup>nd</sup> place. The end of July continued warm, but as soon as the schools broke up and the holiday season started, the weather reverted to true 'English Summer' style with massive floods in Derbyshire with dams threatening to burst, villages evacuated and generally cool, wet and windy weather for the first three weeks of August. *Véraison* on early varieties (Rondo and Frühburgunder<sup>4</sup>) was reported on 12-13 August, with others following, although because the weather was wet and cool, many sites didn't go through colour-change until the end of the month.



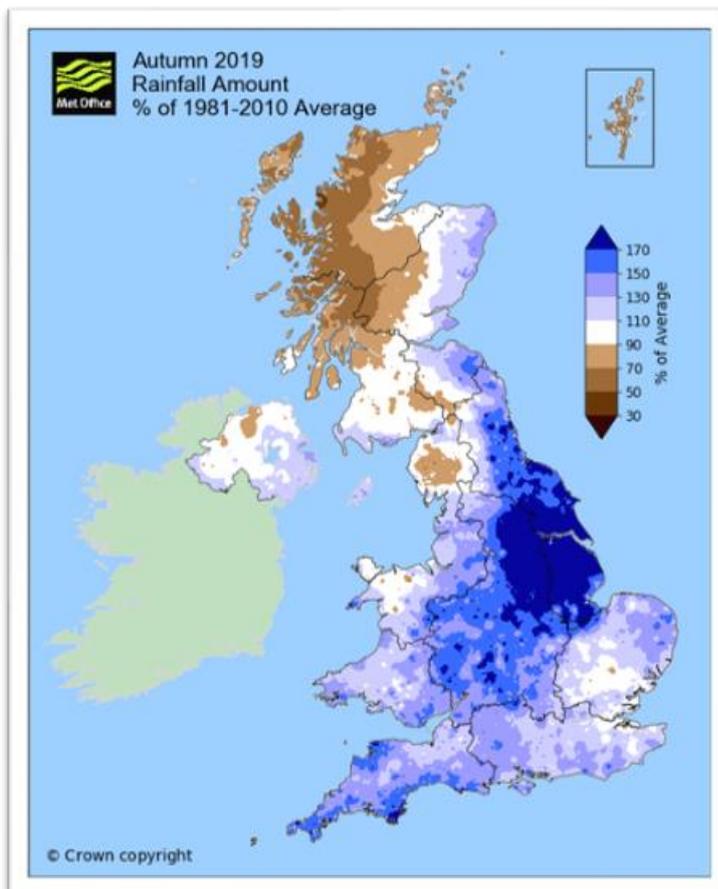
***April – October GDD in 2019 were almost 200 less than in 2018***

As the August Bank Holiday weekend approached, weather forecasters suddenly decided that we were in for a spell of Mediterranean weather and instead of this prediction resulting in rain and high winds, for once they were right. On Thursday 22 August the weather suddenly improved, leaping to the low 30s. Friday and Saturday were very warm, with 33.2°C recorded at Heathrow on Sunday. Bank Holiday Monday surpassed all records with Heathrow recording a temperature of 33.4°C (91.6F), beating the previous high of 28.2C for that day (set at Holbeach, Lincolnshire, in 2017) by a massive 5 degrees. Some vineyards even complained that their vines were suffering from heat stress! Looking at the summer at this

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<sup>4</sup> Pinot noir Précoce

point, it had been quite remarkable with three consecutive days over 30°C in June, July and August – a first – and all-time record highs also in June, July and August. The mean temperature for these three summer months in the UK was 15.1°C which is 0.8 °C above the 1981-2010 average. At this stage most growers had good looking crops of grapes on their vines, with large bunches and prospects of above-average yields. However, it was at this time that things took a turn for the worse.



The second half of September and October 2019 will be remembered for rain. Not just ordinary rain, but heavy and frequent rain which made both timing of picking difficult and the worst picking conditions since – well since most people could remember, although I remember 1981 as being pretty awful. For England as a whole, in September 2019, rain was 154 per cent of LTA, although sunshine was 121 per cent of LTA. For October, the figures were rainfall 136 per cent and sunshine only 84 per cent. For grape growers, things could not

really have been worse. Vines, which in many areas had enjoyed a warm, dry summer and were carrying a large crop and were in good condition, sucked up the water further swelling yields, but slowing down sugar accumulation. Should one wait for the sugars to rise? Wait for good weather? Start picking what looked like a big (and therefore time-consuming) crop? Those who were able to pick their early varieties (Bacchus, Ortega, Reichensteiner and Rondo) in the middle of September got the best of the picking conditions and by and large picked good, disease-free crops. Sugar levels were reasonable (but by no means record-breaking) with middling acid levels which had been diluted along with the sugars. Later-ripening varieties such as the majors, Chardonnay, Pinot noir and Meunier, were in many cases starting to suffer from *Botrytis* and, with the weather showing no signs of improving, picking of these

varieties started, in the wet, in the last week of September. Picking itself in the wet isn't great, but it's possible. What was difficult in many vineyards was the practicalities of loading and hauling a large crop of grapes over grass alleyways and headlands which quickly became rutted and, in some places, turned into semi-liquid mud-baths. As usual, conditions in some regions were worse than others with some parts of Essex and Kent having rainfall around the LTA, but the more westerly regions receiving up to 170 per cent of LTA. What was different was the frequency of the rain with barely a day in October in some parts of southern England that didn't have rain at some stage.

Taken as a whole, 2019 was a disappointing year. The exceptionally warm summer promised much and at the end of August there was every prospect of a very good, ripe harvest. Sadly, the autumn let us down and, in many vineyards, crop was lost to rot and failed to ripen. Both sugars and acids were diluted which is never great for wine quality.

## Yields

**Note:** The following yield tables and data have been taken from the ICCWS-WineGB Yield Survey 2019. This report has a considerable amount more detail than is presented here.

The median yield in 2019 of all vineyards of 0.10-ha or more and of 4 years or older was 5.93 t-ha (2.40 t-acre). This was down from 2018's record-breaking 7.12 t-ha (2.88 t-acre) and much closer to the four-year average of 2016-19 of 5.57 t-ha (2.25 t-acre). Taking a pressing percentage of 62.5 per cent<sup>5</sup> (6.25 hl-tonne), which equates to 37.06 hl-ha, and multiplying it by the estimated area in production of 2,438-ha (6,024-acres) – 300-ha more than 2018 as vineyards planted in the last few years come into production – produces a yield of 12.05 million 75 cl bottles. As in previous years, there is a considerable difference in yields between the best performing vineyards and the rest. As can be seen from the table below, the top 25

Vineyards 0.10 ha or larger and 4 years and older	No. of vineyards	Hectares	Average size ha	Total yield tonnes	Average yield t-ha	Average yield t-acre
Top yielding 25% of vineyards	24	177.4	7.4	1,708.7	9.63	3.90
Middle yielding 50% of vineyards	48	475.4	9.9	2,542.2	5.35	2.16
Bottom yielding 25% of vineyards	24	96.6	4.0	193.0	2.00	0.81
<b>All vineyards 2019</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>749.4</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>4,444.0</b>	<b>5.93</b>	<b>2.40</b>

<sup>5</sup> 62.5 per cent is an educated guess and takes into account both still and sparkling wine producers. Still wine producers might achieve nearer 75 per cent, depending on varieties and pressing practices, whereas some sparkling wine producers only produce between 500 and 650 litres per tonne (50-65 per cent) although many will press out the remainder of the juice for use in still wines or other products.

per cent of vineyards by yield managed to produce 9.63 t-ha (3.90 t-acre) which is 80 per cent higher than the middle 50 per cent and 381 per cent higher than the bottom 25 per cent.

### **Yields of best performing vineyards over time**

As can be seen from the table below, the ability of the top performers to produce yields well above the national average has been fairly consistent over the four years for which we have data and it is running at 73 per cent over the 'all vineyards' average. Of course, because the data is collected and analysed completely anonymously, we have no way of knowing whether these are the same vineyards year by year, or whether they are a different set of growers each year. Varieties may also play a part in this data. For the middle 50 per cent, 5.01 t-ha (2.03 t-acre) must be considered marginal and if the grapes were being sold as grapes (as opposed to as wine) would barely be enough to cover the annual cultivation costs, let alone a return on capital and a profit. The bottom 25 per cent are producing yields which would indicate they are struggling commercially as viable vineyards.

<b>Yields Tonnes-ha</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2016-19 t-ha</b>	<b>2016-19 t-acre</b>
Top 25% of vineyards - all varieties	8.84	9.57	10.52	9.63	9.64	3.90
Middle 50% of vineyards - all varieties	4.41	4.12	6.16	5.35	5.01	2.03
Bottom 25% of vineyards - all varieties	1.36	1.31	1.63	2.00	1.58	0.64
<b>All varieties - all vineyards</b>	<b>4.54</b>	<b>4.68</b>	<b>7.12</b>	<b>5.93</b>	<b>5.57</b>	<b>2.25</b>

### **Yields of individual varieties**

As can be seen from the table below, yields for individual varieties differed quite widely, with Reichensteiner (again) taking the top spot with 7.50 t-ha (3.04 t-acre), but only just with Bacchus taking second place with 7.14 t-ha (2.89 t-acre). These two were the only varieties to achieve more than 7.00 t-ha in 2019. The top four varieties by planted area, Chardonnay, Pinot noir, Bacchus and Meunier, which together occupy around 75 per cent of the vineyards in Britain, achieved an average yield in 2019 of 6.54 t-ha (2.65 t-acre) which, given the weather at end of the growing season, must be considered as quite good. As a comparison, the yield in 2018 of these four varieties was 7.90 t-ha (3.20 t-acre).

Yields Tonnes-ha	2016	2017	2018	2019	Average 2016-19	Av. 2016-19 T-acre
Reichensteiner	8.36	4.37	16.60	7.50	9.21	3.73
Seyval blanc	6.40	11.24	9.38	3.36	7.60	3.07
Regent	No data	5.70	11.09	4.12	6.97	2.82
Meunier	5.88	5.24	9.53	6.23	6.72	2.72
Ortega	No data	No data	No data	6.53	6.53	2.64
Rondo	No data	9.24	7.30	2.66	6.40	2.59
Pinot Blanc	No data	4.86	7.85	No data	6.36	2.57
Chardonnay	5.58	4.42	8.67	6.61	6.32	2.56
Madeleine x Angevine 7672	6.05	5.64	6.70	6.44	6.21	2.51
Pinot noir	3.00	4.31	7.93	6.18	5.36	2.17
Bacchus	3.07	4.21	5.48	7.14	4.98	2.01
Pinot Noir Précoce	1.81	3.50	6.62	4.32	4.06	1.64
Dornfelder	No data	No data	No data	3.47	3.47	1.40
Solaris	No data	No data	No data	2.66	2.66	1.08
Pinot gris	No data	No data	No data	2.21	2.21	0.89
Other varieties*	4.26	3.68	4.10	3.35	3.85	1.56
<b>Average of all varieties</b>	<b>4.93</b>	<b>5.53</b>	<b>8.44</b>	<b>4.85</b>	<b>5.56</b>	<b>2.25</b>

## Regional yields

As ever, yields varied across the country, with much the same east-west pattern as was seen in previous years. The slightly anomalous result for the Thames & Chilterns region which over the four years 2016-19 has the lowest average yield, but in 2019 had the highest average yield (although only by a 0.40 t-ha margin) was due to two parcels of Chardonnay which reported yields of just over 10 t-ha which skewed the results. As ever, it must be remembered that the East Anglia and Thames & Chilterns' data for 2019 came from very small numbers, so it is statistically less reliable than for the other, larger regions.

Yields Tonnes-ha	2016	2017	2018	2019	2016-19 t-ha	2016-19 t-acre
East Anglia	6.89	4.35	6.92	6.09	6.06	2.45
South East	4.31	4.61	9.90	6.43	6.31	2.55
Thames and Chilterns	2.59	5.62	N/A	6.83	5.01	2.03
Wessex	2.08	3.44	9.93	5.66	5.28	2.14
South West	3.95	5.82	5.52	5.35	5.16	2.09
<b>Mean of all regions</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>4.77</b>	<b>8.07</b>	<b>6.07</b>	<b>5.57</b>	<b>2.25</b>

**Stephen Skelton MW**

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