Harvest 2026 – Labadens - Rhône

The Rhône has not experienced a drought this year; the water supply, which turned out to be quite plentiful, has protected the vines from water stress. 2026 was a warm, sun-filled vintage, producing concentrated wines whose aromatic profiles have nevertheless retained beautiful freshness, particularly in the red wines, with distinctive notes of liquorice. The wines are already showing tremendous promise.

2026 has been a year full of paradoxes, challenging many of our usual benchmarks. The plains and plateau areas, normally among the earliest-ripening sectors, are the ones that have required more time this year to reach the desired levels of maturity. Conversely, the hillside vineyards, which are usually the last to be harvested, were the first to see the pruning shears.

As for the grape varieties, the usual difference in ripening times between the later-ripening Grenache and earlier-ripening Syrah has been even more pronounced than usual.

The growing season began under extremely wet conditions. There was a tremendous amount of rainfall throughout the winter—possibly as much as 1,000 mm between September and mid-April. The soils and subsoils became thoroughly saturated with water. All the cover crops established particularly well. By spring, the fava beans stood taller than the vines, while *trifolium incarnatum* carpeted the vineyard rows with its beautiful red colour.

Conditions changed dramatically in May, with an exceptionally early first heatwave. Temperatures reached around 38–40°C and never really dropped thereafter, remaining consistently around 34–35°C during the day until September.

These high temperatures resulted in significant evapotranspiration, causing the soils to dry out. The substantial water reserves accumulated by early spring had fallen to low levels by the end of June. By early July, the vines were beginning to show signs of stress, particularly on stony terroirs, where the first dried leaves began to appear.

Fortunately, several thunderstorms in late July and again in August helped alleviate the drought conditions. The vines quickly regained their vigour, and by August 10 the foliage was green once again, shortly before the first grapes were picked.

The vintage was particularly demanding for the vineyards because of the excessive heat, although water stress itself was less severe than might have been expected. One hypothesis for the vines' remarkable resilience is that the first heatwaves arrived so early in the growing cycle that the vines had time to adapt to the conditions.

From a vegetative standpoint, budbreak occurred early. During the wet conditions of early spring, particular attention was paid to the risk of fungal diseases.

Fruit-set was very promising, and flowering also took place under excellent conditions. Notably, there was no *coulure* (poor fruit set) in the Grenache, despite the variety's susceptibility to it, and flowering was remarkably even.

Harvest has proceeded calmly and under beautiful weather conditions. After several vintages marked by wet weather in September, it has been a real pleasure to work under these conditions this year.

Harvest began very early for the white varieties in general. At Garrigou, picking took place between August 17 and 20. The Viognier came in at relatively low potential alcohol, below 12%. Vinification went extremely well, and we expect a wine with a beautifully delicate aromatic profile.

Our Ventoux vineyards, situated in the northern part of the appellation and normally considered a late-ripening sector, were harvested incredibly early, with picking completed well ahead of the usual finishing dates. The quality is excellent. The wines are highly aromatic, with fresh, fruity notes of black

fruit and liquorice bringing a lovely sense of freshness. The tannins are superb and silky, and the palate already displays beautiful suppleness at this early stage of vinification.

The Roussanne from our white Crozes-Hermitage is now in barrel, and fermentation went extremely well. The Syrah from our red Crozes-Hermitage is silky, generous and concentrated, already showing impressive length at this stage of vinification.

The Châteauneuf-du-Pape grapes were the last one to be harvested, grenache needed more time to reach their maturity. The wines look beautiful, very concentrated but with fabulous aromas.

2026 is a vintage in which all our usual habits and benchmarks have been called into question. Yet the results give us every reason to smile, both for the outstanding quality of the wines and the very respectable quantities harvested.