

Vintage 2018

“With perfect December flowering conditions, the hottest January on record and the wettest February by far, vintage 2018 was ripe with challenges,” summed up Winepress, Marlborough’s regional wine magazine.

In spring, a warm September was followed by a warm, dry, sunny October and a very dry November. At the start of summer, December brought ideal weather for the vines’ flowering – warm, very sunny and dry.

In January, however, the weather was notably hot and wet, with below-average sunshine. With mean temperatures 2.6°C above average, it was the hottest January on record in Blenheim. January rainfall was 180 per cent of the long-term average and exceeded October, November and December combined.

In late summer, two ex-tropical cyclones gave Marlborough its wettest February on record. Winepress described ‘a summer tunnel of warm rain, which heightened botrytis fears while creating abundant healthy canopies’. ‘Have you ever seen Marlborough greener and leafier?’ observed the hugely experienced winemaker, John Forrest. ‘We have lots of leaf to ripen an average crop.’

While stimulating vegetative growth, the heavy rains in January and February (almost three times the average, for the two-month period) also slowed ripening. ‘Those rain events that saw canopies and berries thrive like triffids, also presented a number of disease threats,’ noted New Zealand Winegrower. ‘It has been a costly year for growers, with numerous thinnings, mechanical shakings and pluckings having taken place since January, and a plethora of sprays being needed to avoid potential disease threats.’

In early autumn, March was warmer and wetter (136 per cent of the long-term average), but also slightly sunnier, than normal. Rain in late March started ‘ramping things up for both botrytis and slip skin,’ reported Saint Clair. However, April was a very average month, with mean temperatures, sunshine hours and rainfall all close to normal.

	Rain Fall 2018	Rain Fall LTA		GDD 2018	GDD LTA
July	62.4	65.7		15.5	9.3
August	65.8	62.9		20.6	19.2
September	49.8	50.9		51.4	53.1
October	32.4	55.2		118.3	102.7
November	16.4	47.4		152.3	146.9
December	21.6	48.2		229.4	213.2
January	80.4	46.7		330.6	252.2
February	181.4	44.7		248.0	223.4
March	53.6	43.9		235.7	190.5
April	52.2	52.7		99.0	108.6
May	85.2	63.9		90.0	56.1
June	39.4	60		8.2	18.4
Total	740.6	642.2		1599.0	1393.6

Precise weather data is available from <https://www.mrc.org.nz/blenheim-weather-station>