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Things We're Dwelling on Now...

The Care and Feeding of Bacteria

Chris Gerling, Enology Extension Associate, Cornell University - NYSAES

First published in [Cellar Dweller - December 2009](#).

One of the consequences of Harvest Delay '09 (as we'll be calling it in the roaring 2020s) is just coming into focus now. The ripple effect of late picking has begat late crushing, late fermentation, and now late malolactic fermentation (MLF). Depending on your location and cellar arrangement, temperature can be a problem this time of year. Lactic acid bacteria (LAB), just like yeast, have preferred environmental conditions in which to operate, and these include a thermostat set at approximately room temperature (18- 22C or 64-71F). LAB can succeed in temperatures outside this range, but their ability to do so will now depend even more on the wine's pH (~3.4), % alcohol (<13), SO₂ level (< 30 ppm total), nutrient availability (some nutrients available), etc. Put another way, a temperature of 15C (59F) is a much bigger problem if your pH is 2.9. A person who is cold can still be cheerful, but a person who is cold and hungry is probably not smiling. Lactic acid bacteria are not so different. The more of their needs you can meet, the less likely they'll be to misbehave.

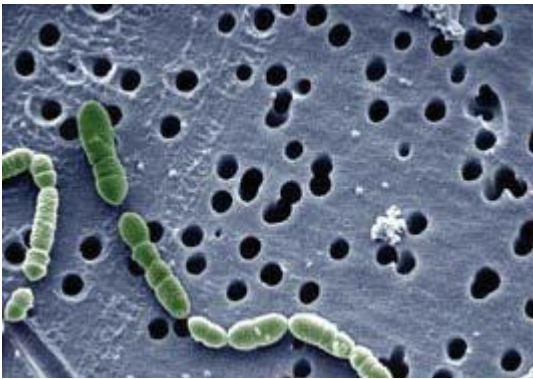


Photo: Utah State

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