

RESCUE DOGS: WHO IS BEING RESCUED? ALL OF US!

Dogs have been used for thousands of years and on every continent to protect crops of wheat and barley, as well as animals, such as sheep, goats, and chickens. Today, dogs can detect human disease, explosives, and even gold. So, it should come as no surprise that dogs can be trained to be protectors of vineyards and wineries.

The Hope and Glory Inn's Dog and Oyster Vineyard located in Irvington has had dogs within its vines for 16 years, starting with four dogs and now six (hound dogs named Flo, Jughead, Randy Travis, Winnie, and Peebles, and a beagle named Buster). Mark Hollingsworth, the son of Dudley and Peggy Patteson, introduced the concept to the wineries in our AVA (American Viticultural Area) – Northern Neck – George Washington Birthplace. Good Luck Cellars followed suit.

Dogs in vineyards are primarily there to keep pesky deer and other grape-eating animals at bay. They also can be trained to sniff bugs such as the female vine mealybug. It is the same method trainers have used for search and rescue missions. They can pinpoint the location even to the specific vine.

Vineyards use a variety of alternative defenses including six-foot-high fencing, electrified fencing, hair, detergents, and soap. But, there is nothing like a dog, so The Dog and Oyster Vineyard totally embraced the concept of using dogs from the beginning.

A formal dog care and vineyard protection plan was laid out. The first step was to install an “invisible fence” around each 3-acre parcel of grapes. The “invisible fence” uses digital radio frequencies. A control panel broadcasts the signal, much like a radio station along an insulated cable buried around the property. When a dog's computer collar receiver crosses into the signal field, it first provides an audible warning tone, then provides a gentle static correction that reminds him he's reached the limits of his boundary.

Next came the insulated dog houses complete with metal roofs and a front porch for just laying around. To help with the dreaded cold of winter, radiator heaters were placed inside, and heated water buckets were placed just outside. Water misters have been added to help with the heat of summer along with many water stations. Food is disbursed via many automatic feeders.

In addition, these vineyard dogs are well taken care of by our vineyard's “Dog Angel” Terri Dort, who feeds and cares for these dogs every day. She is our area's leading advocate for dogs, having created the Northern Neck Partners for Pets – A Safe Haven for Unwanted and At-Risk Pets.

When you think they could not be better cared for, these dogs are spoiled every season as our wine guests are provided with dog biscuits and are encouraged to explore the vineyard and to feed the dogs.

What makes this vineyard's dogs so special that all the dogs are rescue dogs introduced to the Dog and Oyster by either the County Animal Shelter or the Animal Welfare League. Every dog has the opportunity to become a vineyard dog, but they have to earn it. Each dog cannot so much as growl at another dog and especially wine guests. If they do, they won't be selected. Once here and proven to be friendly, there are still two weeks of training to acclimate them to the invisible fence. Should a dog qualify, they truly think that they must have died and gone to heaven because the vineyard life is so well suited for a dog's happiness.

They may be dogs we rescued from being put down, but they rescue us every single day because they protect our grapes and delight our wine guests with a disposition we all wish we had. There is no need for hospitality training with a dog. They are grateful, and so are we.