

BATTLING SUCKERS AGAINST TIME AND BUDGET

By Pedro Hernandez, Product Development Project Manager



Sucker control is an expensive and time consuming task that many growers must perform on a yearly basis. Suckers are nonproductive and undesirable plant material that protrude from the trunk, base of the rootstalk, or roots. The main reason suckers are removed is to maintain the shape of the tree or vine; however, suckers can interfere with farming practices such as irrigation, weed control, and harvest. Suckers can also harbor insects and diseases that can move over to the crop. Grape, cherry, plum, pomegranate, and olive are among the crops that often require suckering.

Typically, suckers are removed manually which puts stress on budgets and an already short supply of available labor. Growers have been known to spend up to \$200/acre per pass on manual labor to remove suckers, and often two passes are needed to effectively remove the suckers during the season. A more economical and efficient alternative to manual removal of suckers is chemical burndown with non-systemic contact herbicides. For this strategy to be effective, suckers must be sprayed while they are young and tender (8 to 12 inches of growth), and complete spray coverage is imperative. Often, two applications spaced at 3 to 4 weeks are necessary for control. Chemical sucker control can be accomplished in two ways: (1) by using a standard herbicide sprayer and adjusting the direction and height of the nozzles to spray the suckers or (2) by spot spraying with a hand wand. Whichever method is chosen, make sure it fits the needs of the orchard or vineyard.



The fastest and easiest way to remove suckers is via the spray rig, but with this method, thorough spray coverage may not be achieved, and the area in-between trunks will needlessly be sprayed if suckers are not present. However, if weeds exist on the berm, both weeds and suckers can be controlled with the application. With the sprayer application, multiple applications will likely be needed.

Spot spraying is the most effective way to control suckers since only the suckers are being targeted for treatment, good spray coverage can be accomplished, and waste of spray product will be reduced. However, this strategy is a bit more time consuming and labor intensive.

Proper selection of herbicides for sucker control is key to avoid damaging the trees or vines. Venue® herbicide from Nichino America is registered for sucker control in a number of crops including grape, pomegranate, cherry, prune, and olive. Venue is a Group 14 PPO contact herbicide/desiccant which rapidly burns down suckers and tender shoots without translocation into the tree or vine. In recent sucker control studies in the Central Valley and Central Coast, Venue proved very effective at providing control of suckers in grape, cherry, pomegranate, and plum. When comparing spot treatment versus spray rig application, Venue showed superior control via spot treatment. Venue at 4 fl oz/acre should be used alone or in combination with paraquat, glufosinate, or carfentrazone at label use rates. Use of COC or MSO is recommended. Because spray coverage is critical, use 30 to 40 gallons of water per acre or spray suckers by hand till wet. Venue will also provide burndown of broadleaf weeds. The label allows a total of 12 fl oz per acre per year for weed and sucker control. Always read and follow all labels for use directions.



Untreated Grape Suckers



Venue 4 fl oz
Spot Spray Application



Venue 4 fl oz
Spray Rig Application

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