Return of the orange slime

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In the past week, you may have noticed orange slimy growth on bleeding pruning wounds in vineyards. It tends to be associated with wounds that have prolific bleeding. The wet soil conditions of this spring combined with some late pruning are most likely responsible for the excessive bleeding evident on the pruning wounds. The last time we saw this type of growth in many vineyards was 2004. The following is taken from a 2004 Tender Fruit Grape Vine article:

After a lot of culturing in Petri plates, we determined that a number of fungal species (*Fusarium acuminatum*, *Fusarium merisomoides*, *Epicoccum nigrum* and *Aureobasidium* spp.) and a yeast were present in most of the samples.

This pretty much confirmed my initial suspicion. *Epicoccum* and *Aureobasidium* are frequently found growing on the surface of plants and do not cause disease. In fact, they are commonly used as biological control agents for some plant diseases. Yeasts are commonly found on the surfaces of all grape tissues, including wood, leaves, and fruit. No *Fusarium* species is known to cause disease in grape, so these fungi were most likely just present in the air and happened to land on the sap or were benignly present on the wood surface.

Why did these fungi grow so rapidly in the pruning wound sap? Three of the main requirements for fungal growth are water, a nutrient source and warm temperatures. The sap that flows from the pruning wounds contains water and carbohydrates (primarily sugar compounds). Any self-respecting fungus is going to capitalize on a ready source of food and grow; especially when the temperatures are mild. Thus, lots of food, good weather, and opportunistic fungi – voilá, orange slime!

Is it worthwhile to spray for these fungi? No. They don't do anything but live on dead plant material for the most part. They do not infect or compromise wood quality in any way and they also do not infect leaves or fruit during the growing season.