



There are a lot of words to describe wine. What do they mean? Take a look at our wine glossary to learn more.

See - Swirl - Sniff - Sip

Words to describe what you may see in wine—

- **BUBBLES** The appearance of bubbles in a still wine is usually indicative of the presence of carbon dioxide left over from fermentation, or even intentionally dissolved into white wine to enhance “freshness.” It may, however, be an effect of some microbial process occurring in the bottle, and would usually be coupled with other sensory issues. It is never welcomed in red wine.
- **CLARITY** Wine should be clear, without films, haze, or particulate matter. Some wine that is not highly filtered prior to bottling may have a slight haze or dullness that does not detract from the other qualities of the wine. Red wines that have aged for a period of time may develop a deposit of sediment in the bottle, which is normal, and if not properly decanted, may show up in the glass as haze or particles. Some wines which have been chilled for a long time may develop crystals in the bottle which will either stick to the cork, or drift down the bottom. These Potassium Bitartrate crystals, or Cream of Tarter, are harmless, and do not affect the flavor of the wine.
- **COLOR-RED WINES** When young, many red wines have significant proportions of blue coloration, making them appear purple. Some reds are typically lighter in color, and therefore should not be considered lacking; Pinot Noir and Gamay are good examples. However, pale colored Syrah or Cabernet Sauvignon is another matter, and your experience will guide you. Older reds begin to take on tawny/orange hues, but these colors should not be expected in young reds. Brown is the end point in ageing; usually the wine is dead by then.
- **COLOR-WHITE WINES** Extremely pale, even colorless wines are often typical of underripe grapes. Greenish hues also may indicate immaturity at harvest. Light straw yellow through medium gold are the usual colors of young whites. Deep gold is found in dessert/late harvest whites, wines that have been matured for a time in oak barrels, and aged whites. Amber/tawny colors occur with further age, but are not to be expected in young wines, with the exception of sherry and other intentionally oxidized styles.
- **LEGS/TEARS** The streams of wine down the inside of a glass after it has been swirled. Not at all a sign of quality, but a general relation to the alcohol content of the wine. The thinner the streams, the higher the alcohol.

Words to describe what you may smell in wine—

- **AROMA** The primary smell of the young wine, including its varietal aroma (the smell that the characteristic grapes bring to the wine) and its fermentation aroma (the smell that the wine making gives to the wine, such as barrel aromas, yeasty aromas, etc).
- **BOUQUET** The complex smell that develops as the various aromas of the young wine mingle and mature in the bottle as it ages. Also known as bottle bouquet.
- **OFF ODORS** May include smells that are unpleasant, but usually limited to wine flaws such as the pungency of Sulfur Dioxide (like a burnt match head), Hydrogen Sulfide (rotten eggs), cork taint (like a moldy cellar), vinegar, Ethyl Acetate (nail polish remover), etc.



Words to describe what you may feel or taste in wine—

- **ACETIC** Strictly used in reference to a specific wine flaw, the presence of vinegar, or acetic acid.
- **ACIDIC** Generally means too much acid.
- **ACIDITY** The degree to which a wine has sourness, or tartness, a taste perceived on the tongue. Derived from natural grape acids, primarily tartaric and malic, but may also include lactic and acetic from microbial action, whether intentional or otherwise.
- **AGGRESSIVE** A young wine that has not yet mellowed as perhaps it should have, or a wine can be aggressively acidic, tannic, etc.
- **ALCOHOL** Essential component of wine which gives a sense of sweetness, especially in dry wine, and contributes to body and length of finish. Can be noticed as warmth in the back of the throat. Big is a term used often to describe a wine high in alcohol, usually also heavy in body. Too much alcohol in a wine makes it hot.
- **AROMATIC** Plenty of aromas (the opposite of reticent).
- **ASTRINGENCY** A drawing, puckering, tactile sensation caused by grape and oak tannins that are an essential part of wine flavor. Mostly observed in the front of the mouth, on the teeth, gums, lips, etc. Usually more present in red wine than white. Tannic is another term for astringency.
- **AUSTERE** Tough and unforgiving, perhaps too young, too dry, or too tannic.
- **BAKED** Flavors of cooked fruit, a lack of freshness, with a characteristic caramel/prune/raisin odor.
- **BALANCE** Refers to all of a wine's components of acidity, alcohol, sweetness, astringency, and flavor (odors perceived in the mouth along with taste) are harmonious; no single component is obtrusive.
- **BITTERNESS** The degree to which a wine tastes bitter, noticed at the back of the tongue. Not necessarily a positive quality, but typically present in some young red wines, and certain white varieties.
- **BODY** Refers to the viscosity of a wine. Some things that may affect body include alcohol content, oak ageing, and residual sugar.
- **CLOYING** Used to describe wines that are much too sweet.
- **CLUMSY** A descriptor used for an unbalanced wine with too much alcohol, tannin, etc.
- **CREAMY** A sense of both the richness and oiliness of cream; strictly textural.
- **CRISP** A term generally used to describe a wine with pleasant or adequate acidity.
- **DENSE** Generally a reference to color depth, but sometimes of depth of flavor.
- **DRIED OUT** Said of the fruit qualities of a wine too old and lacking.
- **DRY** Describes wines that have no sweetness. Dry is the opposite of sweet. Not to be confused with the drying effect of astringency.
- **EXPANSIVE** A wine that seems to increase in flavor in your mouth, especially about mid-way through.
- **FINISH** The final taste of a wine, after spitting or swallowing. A wine that is long has a finish that is prolonged, while a wine that is short fades quickly.
- **FLAT or FLABBY** Terms used to describe a wine that does not have enough acidity.
- **FLAVOR** Odors perceived in the mouth coupled with taste.
- **FORWARD** A wine that seems giving and relatively mature at a young age for its type.
- **FRUITY** Self descriptive, but don't confuse with sweetness.
- **GREEN** Used to describe an overly acidic wine, especially reminding one of the taste of unripe fruit.
- **HERBACEOUS** Flavors and especially aromas pleasant and reminiscent of herbs (sage, thyme, etc.).
- **LEAN** Lacking breadth of flavors.
- **MOUTH FILLING** Means a richness and concentration of flavors that seem to fill the whole mouth.



RODNEY STRONG

Vineyards

- **ROBUST** Sturdy, full bodied wine, especially red.
- **ROUND** A smooth, soft edged wine, more ready to drink.
- **SALTINESS** All wines contain a certain amount of acids in the form of salts, which contribute in a small way to the taste of wine. High pH wines sometimes seem “salty,” but it is a rare tasting note.
- **SILKY** A subjective descriptor of texture.
- **SIMPLE** One dimensional flavors, no complexity, a quaffer.
- **SPRITZY** Refers to dissolved CO₂. Pubescence of intensely matted, woolly hairs covering a leaf surface
- **STRUCTURE** Related to balance; all of the in mouth basic impressions of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, along with alcohol, body, etc., but in absence of the more complex, organoleptic impressions detectable by the olfactory bulb. In other words, everything but the aroma.
- **SWEETISH** This can mean a wine a bit too sweet, or just a wine that seems a bit sweet, but may not be.
- **SWEETNESS** The degree to which a wine tastes sweet. Sweetness is tasted on the tongue. Residual sugar also can change the viscosity of a wine, making it richer. The impression of sweetness comes from either sugars, or alcohol, or both, and can be altered in relationship to the presence of acidity.
- **TART** Typically used to describe a wine that is perhaps a bit too acidic.
- **TASTE** One's sense of taste is limited to those sensations that the taste buds can perceive; sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and savoryness. There are also tactile sensations in the mouth, such as temperature, viscosity, etc. Flavor is really a combination of taste and aroma as perceived in the mouth.
- **VEGETAL** A pronounced quality of strong herbaceousness in generally unpleasant proportions. Flavors and aromas of wilting or half-cooked green bell peppers, asparagus, green beans, etc.
- **VELVETY** Much like silky, perhaps richer.
- **WATERY** Thin, dilute.