

WINE TASTING TIPS

So you've arrived at a winery and are ready to taste the fruits of the winemaker's labor. But how do you "taste" wine if you're only a casual wine drinker? Don't worry, it's simpler than you think.

Here you'll find the following:

[Basic wine tasting tips](#)

[Advanced wine tasting tips](#)

[A glossary of words to describe wine](#)

BASIC WINE TASTING

Tasting wine doesn't have to be a long, drawn out process and you don't need to be a professional wine taster in order to visit a Pennsylvania winery. That said, the following tips will have you up and sampling in no time.

1. Pour wine into a clean, clear glass. Hold glass by the stem.
2. View the glass against a white background or light to observe the wine's color and clarity.
3. Swirl wine glass for a few seconds to let wine "breathe" and bring out the aromas.
4. Sniff wine.
5. Sip wine. Roll the wine gently in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing.
6. Consider your impressions of the wine. Feel free to ask the host about his or her impressions of the wine and its characteristics.
6. Repeat with same wine or different wine. If desired, skip steps two through four.
7. Ask questions. Winery staff is helpful and will guide you through the process - take the intimidating factor away and replace it with a chance to learn more about wine.

ADVANCED WINE TASTING

Once you've mastered basic wine tasting, you're ready to move to the next level. It's a lot like basic wine tasting, but with a few extra steps and detailed observations. You can taste wines horizontally (multiple wines from the same vintage or year) or vertically (the same wine from different vintages). Generally, white wine is tasted before red wine and dry wines are sampled before sweet wines.

1. Pour wine. Allow enough room in the glass to allow swirling. If you only plan to sample the wine before moving on to another, pour just enough for a few sips.

WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN TASTING WINE

1. Don't offer your opinion or descriptions of the wine until everyone in your party has had an opportunity to taste and consider their own opinions.
2. Don't wear heavy cologne or perfume, as the scents may interfere with the tasting process.
3. Don't consume irresponsibly and don't be averse to having a designated driver. Drinking in excess diminishes your sense of taste. (Spit buckets are available to dispose of excess wine after tasting.)
4. Don't be afraid to talk about the wine and offer your opinion. If you don't have an opinion (or don't want to share it), ask the winery host questions about the winery and its wine.

2. Observe wine. Tilt the glass away from you and note the color of the wine from the edges to the middle. This works best against a light colored background. Different wines will vary in their color intensity (white wines darken with age, while red wines lose their intensity and may turn brownish or brick red). Also observe the clarity of the wine.
3. Swirl the wine. This expands the surface area of the wine, allowing oxygen into the wine and bringing out its natural aromas. To swirl, place the wine glass on a flat surface and, while grasping the stem, move the glass in a tight circle for a few seconds. If a flat surface isn't available, swirl gently by moving your wrist or hand.
4. Sniff the wine, first with your nose a few inches from the glass, then feel free to insert your nose into the glass and breathe deeply. Repeat if desired, resting your sense of smell in between.

Do you smell wood, fruit, flowers, earth? These and other nuanced aromas can be found in many wines and will give you an indication of what to expect when you taste it. The sniff test can also detect spoiled wines, which may smell like moldy cheese or vinegar, before you taste it. NOTE: The scent of a wine is usually referred to as its "nose" or "bouquet," not its "smell.")

5. Sip the wine. "Chew" it or roll it over your tongue to cover your taste buds. Because smell and taste are inextricably linked, feel free to breathe lightly through your nose while tasting the wine. Some advanced tasters even slurp air in through their mouth and over the wine (though not always).
6. Swallow the wine – or not. Most people swallow the wine, but some, especially those tasting many different wines, will spit the wine into a receptacle provided at most wineries or into a paper cup, which is later dumped into the receptacle.
7. Discuss the wine. Once everyone in your party has tasted the wine and has had a chance to form some opinions, talk about the wine and what you noticed or liked about it. Involve the winery host in the conversation. Chances are they know more about that particular wine than anyone else in the room.

HOW TO DESCRIBE THE WINE

For many people, this is the most intimidating part of the wine tasting process. But it doesn't need to be, and no one at a winery expects you to be a wine tasting expert. In fact, a vast majority of winery visitors aren't! When tasting and discussing the wine, there are many ways to describe the experience. You may simply say that you like it or don't like it, or you may consider any of the following more detailed descriptors:

ACID – An acidic wine, often a characteristic of white wines, is slightly tart or sour and will make your mouth water after swallowing it. A wine that is too acidic is considered "sharp."

BALANCE – A balanced wine has the right proportion of alcohol, residual sugar (sweetness), acid and tannin.

BODY – This refers to the "weight" of the wine in your mouth, which is a description of the intensity of the wine's flavor. The body is usually described as light, medium, or full.

BOLD – A robust wine full of flavor, with many different distinct characteristics.

COMPLEX – Similar to bold, complex wines have many layers of flavor and characteristics. Complexity is usually developed as a wine ages.

CRISP – A wine with refreshing acidity. Usually used to describe white wines. The opposite of a “soft” wine.

DRY – A wine that is not sweet and usually high in tannins. Usually describes red wines.

FINISH – The taste the wine leaves after you swallow it or spit it out.

FIRM – A wine with medium or balanced tannic content or acidity.

LENGTH – How long the wine taste lingers on your palate after swallowing it.

NOTES – You may choose to take notes during your tasting experiences (in fact, it’s recommended), but in this case, notes refers to the subtle flavors sensed in the wine.

Red wines contain fruity notes like berries, plum or figs (even though they’re not made from these fruits). Reds may also have spicy flavors like cinnamon and pepper, or earthy flavors like cedar, oak, smokiness or soil (yes, soil, and that’s not always a bad thing).

White wines can taste like lighter colored fruits (pears, apples or citrus fruits) or contain floral, butter, or honey notes.

SOFT – A smooth wine, typically a characteristic of red wines. The opposite of a “crisp” wine.

TANNIN – A characteristic found in red wines (a byproduct of grape skins and seeds), which leaves the mouth feeling dry and “puckery.” A dry, tannic wine is described as “chewy.”

SWEETNESS – Found commonly in dessert wines, though many wines have varying degrees of sweetness.