

## GROWN IN WASHINGTON – GRAPES – 2015

### HISTORY

The earliest grape vines planted in Washington State were at Fort Vancouver in 1825 by traders working for the Hudson's Bay Company but it is not known for sure whether wine was ever produced from these plantings. The first people who were definitely known to produce wine were German and Italian immigrants who planted their wine grapes in Washington during the 1860s and 1870s. Washington was one of the first states to usher in the start of Prohibition, going dry in 1917 and shutting down most of the state's wine production. Some scattered grape growers stayed afloat during this period selling grapes to home winemakers but nearly all the state's commercial wines went out of business. Following the end of Prohibition, Washington's fledgling wine industry was based primarily on fortified sweet wine production made from the [Vitis Labrusca](#) variety [Concord](#). The Nawico and Pommerelle wineries were the most widely recognized producers, making millions of gallons each year of sweet jug wine made from Concord and other varieties.<sup>[8]</sup> In the 1950s, the planting of [Vitis vinifera](#) saw an increase spearheaded, in part, by the work of Dr. [Walter Clore](#) and [Washington State University](#) which conducted a series of trials on which grape vines could produce the best wine in various soils and climates of Washington.

The roots of the modern Washington wine industry can be traced to the middle of the 20th century when a group of professors from the [University of Washington](#) turned their home [winemaking](#) operation into a commercial endeavor and founded Associated Vintners (later renamed [Columbia Winery](#)) and focused on producing premium wines. The Nawico and Pommerelle wineries were merged into a new winery that would eventually become Chateau Ste Michelle. With the hiring of [Andre Tchelistcheff](#) as a consultant, Chateau Ste Michelle and Associated Vintners became the driving force in premium wine production for the early modern Washington wine industry. Grenache was one of the first [Vitis vinifera](#) grapes to be successfully vinified with a 1966 [Yakima Valley](#) rosé earning mention in wine historian [Leon Adams](#)'s treatise *The Wines of America*. The 1970s ushered in a period of expansion, with early vineyards being planted in the Columbia Gorge, Walla Walla and Red Mountain areas. The 1978 [Leonetti Cellars](#) Cabernet Sauvignon was featured on the cover of a national wine publication and touted as the best Cabernet of vintage. The 1980s saw further expansion with the opening of large-scale family-owned wineries such as [Woodward Canyon](#), [L'Ecole N°41](#), [Barnard Griffin](#) and [Hogue Cellars](#) that soon won many awards from both national and international wine competitions. In 1988, Chateau Ste Michelle was named "Best American Winery" and in 1989 five Washington wines made [Wine Spectator](#)'s "Top 100 list" for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

### GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Cascade Mountain range is a defining feature in both the geography and climate of Washington state. It serves as a dividing line between the wet, marine influenced climate of the western part of the state from the drier, desert-like climate of the eastern half. The mountains themselves create a rain shadow over the eastern half by blocking weather fronts holding precipitation from carrying over the mountains and descending onto the Columbia River Basin. This creates the arid desert-like conditions with a more continental climate in Eastern Washington and heightens the roles of rivers—most notably the [Walla Walla](#), [Yakima](#), [Snake](#) and [Columbia River](#)—in the region's viticulture. In addition to providing vital irrigation sources, the rivers also help to moderate temperatures during the winter which is prone to severe frost and freeze coming from the Arctic. In winter, overnight temperatures in the wine growing regions of Eastern Washington can drop to as low as -15 °F (-26 °C). The sudden drop to these sub-zero temperatures can make the water in a vine's wood canopy quickly freeze which can cause the

vine to literally burst open. The severity of these conditions can wreak havoc on a year's harvest, as was the case in the Walla Walla AVA with the big winter freezes of 1996 and 2003.

Today the topsoil found throughout the Columbia Valley is mostly sandy and stone-studded on top of basalt-based soil foundation created by persistent lava. These sandy loam vineyard soils create a nearly inhospitable environment for the phylloxera louse, which may be one of the reasons why the phylloxera epidemic has not ravaged the Washington wine industry as it has the Californian and French wine industries in the past. The state's northerly location above the 46<sup>th</sup> parallel north allows Washington's major wine growing regions to experience 17 hours of sunlight in the summer—two more hours of sunlight during the peak of growing season than what California sees further south. During the growing season Eastern Washington experiences a wide diurnal temperature variation (up to 40 °F (4.4 °C) difference between daytime highs and nighttime lows) which allows the fruit to fully ripen while the cool nights help the vines to shut down, allowing the grape to maintain natural levels of acidity.

### GRAPE VARIETIES

The early Washington wine industry focused predominately on white wines but in recent years, led by the "Merlot-craze" of the 1990s have shifted the focus to the state's red wines. [Chardonnay](#) also experienced a surge of interest in the 1990s and along with [Riesling](#) are among the most widely planted grape varieties in the state. While the acreage of Riesling has been steadily declining, there has been renewed interest in the grape in recent years that has been bolstered by the joint Eroica venture between Chateau Ste Michelle and [German](#) winemaker [Ernst Loosen](#) and the investment by [Bonny Doon](#) founder's [Randall Graham](#) to open a winery focused solely on Riesling production. Experts like [Jancis Robinson](#) have noted that Washington state consistently produces white wines of exceptional quality, specifically mentioning those of the [Semillon](#) variety. Merlot was one of the first major *vinifera* varieties to garner international attention for the state with its distinctive earthiness and structure that can be very different from the softer, plusher styles found in California. However the Merlot vine is very sensitive to frost and after significant damages during major winter freezes in 1996 & 2003, more vintners turned their attention to the hardier [Cabernet Sauvignon](#) and [Cabernet Franc](#). This led to interest in [Bordeaux](#)-style blends. In the early 21st century, [Syrah](#) has emerged on the scene as a major player.

Today there are over 80 grape [varieties](#) grown in Washington state, but the primary grapes used in the production of wine are from the [Vitis vinifera](#) family of grapes. The main grapes used in wine production in Washington are [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), [Riesling](#), [Chardonnay](#), [Merlot](#), and [Syrah](#). There are also plantings of Cabernet Franc, [Grenache](#), [Malbec](#), [Pinot gris](#), [Sauvignon blanc](#), [Semillon](#), [Tempranillo](#), [Viognier](#), [Barbera](#), [Chenin blanc](#), [Gewürztraminer](#), [Nebbiolo](#), [Petite Sirah](#), [Pinot noir](#), [Sangiovese](#), and [Zinfandel](#).<sup>[21]</sup> Vineyard acreage dedicated to red varieties was 17,351 acres (7,022 ha) in 2006. The four most prevalent red varieties were Cabernet Sauvignon at 5,959 acres (2,412 ha), Merlot at 5,853 acres (2,369 ha), Syrah at 2,831 acres (1,146 ha), and Cabernet Franc at 1,157 acres (468 ha). Vineyard acreage planted to white varieties was 13,649 acres (5,524 ha). The four most prevalent white varieties were Chardonnay at 5,992 acres (2,425 ha), Riesling at 4,404 acres (1,782 ha), Sauvignon blanc at 993 acres (402 ha), and Gewürztraminer at 632 acres (256 ha).<sup>[22]</sup>

### SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Wikipedia – Washington Wine