

GENERAL STORY OF WINE

Wine is old. Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest wine production came from sites in [Georgia](#) and [Iran](#), dating from 6000 to 5000 Before Christ (BC). It points to domestication of grapevine, in the Early [Bronze Age](#) sites of the [Near East](#), [Sumer](#) and [Egypt](#), from around the third millennium BC. Some archaeological sites in Greece, dating from 6,500 years BC, contain remnants of the world's earliest evidence of crushed grapes. The Greek writer [Theophrastus](#) is actually the oldest known source to describe this aspect of Greek wine making. In [Egypt](#), wine became a part of recorded history, playing an important role in ancient [ceremonial life](#). Wine was possibly introduced into Egypt by the [Ancient Greeks](#). Traces of wine were also found in China, dating from the second and first millennium BC.

Wine was common in classical Greece and Rome. The Ancient Greeks introduced [vines](#) such as [Vitis vinifera](#) and made wine in their numerous colonies in [Italy](#), [Sicily](#), southern [France](#), and [Spain](#). [Dionysus](#) was the Greek god of wine and revelry, and wine was frequently referred to in the works of [Homer](#) and [Aesop](#). Many of the major wine producing regions of Western Europe today were established by the Romans. Wine making technology improved considerably during the time of the Roman Empire. Many grape varieties and cultivation techniques were known. Barrels were developed for storing and shipping wine.



Dionysus, the god of wine

Since Roman times, wine (potentially mixed with herbs and minerals) was assumed to serve medicinal purposes as well. During Roman times it was not uncommon to dissolve pearls in

wine for better health. Cleopatra created her own legend by promising Marc Anthony she would "drink the value of a province" in one cup of wine, after which she drank an expensive pearl with a cup of wine. Another medieval application was the use of snake-stones (banded [Agate](#) resembling the figural rings on a snake) dissolved in wine against snake bites, which shows an early understanding of the effects of alcohol on the central nervous system in such situations.

In [medieval Europe](#), the [Christian Church](#) was a staunch supporter of wine which was necessary for the celebration of the Catholic Mass. Wine was on the contrary forbidden in the [Islamic civilization](#), but after [Geber](#) and other [Muslim chemists](#) pioneered the [distillation](#) of wine, it was used for other purposes, including [cosmetic](#) and [medical](#) uses. In fact the 10th century Persian philosopher and scientist [Al Biruni](#) described a number of recipes where herbs, minerals and even gemstones are mixed with wine for medicinal purposes. Wine was so revered and its effect so feared that elaborate theories were developed and which gemstone-cups would best counteract its negative side effects.



Illuminations about grape picking

- 1 - The men are planting vine.
- 2 - They are fixing it to stakes to make it stay right
- 3 - They are picking grapes.
- 4 - They are pressing the grape with their foots in a big and high barrel in order to make wine.

Grape Picking

Grape picking consists in harvesting grape intended for wine production (it doesn't refer to the harvesting of grape for personal consumption.) In French, the same word “vendange” (singular) is used to describe the grape itself harvested and crushed during a special period, also called “vendanges” (plural).

There are two systems of grape picking:

- Manual : the manual grape picking is used to produce high quality wines and sparkling wines, in so far as you have to select the bunches. In consequence, the production prices increase.
- Mechanic : it's cheaper than the manual system, because it uses machines and is used to produce ordinary wine: bunches more or less matured are mixed with others even spoiled, with evident consequences on the final product quality.

There are also other systems used:

- Selective grape picking: it consists in vintaging the bunches of a same vine gradually through successive crossing, according to the maturation of each bunch.
- Late grape picking: it consists in delaying the time of the grape picking with the aim of increasing the sugar content of the grape; this method is used to produce liqueur-like wines.

Independently of the grape picking method, some rules have to be respected:

- Avoid vintaging wet grapes, as the extra water could have a negative influence on the quality of the must.
- Avoid harvesting during the hottest hours of the day: it can cause an undesirable fermentation and an exaggerated extraction of the color for the elaboration of rosé wine.
- Bunches have to be poured in limited-size containers to avoid being crushed.
- Grapes have to be carried to the vinification cave as fast as possible, to avoid uncontrolled fermentation and steeping.

For the wine produced on the colder limits of wine production, vintage is very important because some seasons will be much warmer and produce riper grapes and better wines. On the other hand, a poor growing season can lead to grapes with a low level of sugar, which lowers the quality of the resulting wine.

In many regions, especially in the new world, growing seasons are much more uniform. But in dry regions, the systematic and controlled use of irrigation also contributes to uniform vintages.

Grape picking times differ according to the regions: they take place between July and October. They depend on different factors and correspond with the period when the grapes reach the better degree of sugar. Weather conditions are important factors, because in highest latitudes grape picking occurs later.

Interview of Mr. Patrice GENTIÉ, vine nurseryman:

- Who are you?

I'm a vine nurseryman. In my nursery we graft vine plants for wine growers of the south-west of France and for gardeners all over France.

- Do you do grape picking in your nursery?

Yes, we have 6 hectares of vineyard, so we do it each year.

- What is the good period to pick up grapes? How do you decide on the right moment to do it?

Dates are not regular, they change each year according to the weather. When maturity approaches we measure the sugar level and the acidity of the grape juice. When we consider that the evolution is optimal we begin to harvest.

- There are two ways of harvesting. Which one do you use? And why?

Since 1985 we have used mechanical harvesting. The advantages are numerous: it's cheaper than manual harvesting. The organisation is easier (when it rains for example it's difficult to have men ready to pick up grapes) and the machine selects mature seeds.



The harvesting machine

- *Can you explain how this machine works?*

It makes the vine branches vibrate, and the mature seeds fall down on a conveyor belt, then leaves are blown out by a fan and the vintage is stored in a hopper.



Hopper full of bunches