

AN INTRODUCTION TO OREGON

of Wineries

120 in 1998

of Acres

9,000

First Plantings

In 1961

Major Regions

Columbia Valley, Rogue Valley, Umpqua Valley, Willamette Valley, Walla Walla Valley. The most famous, Willamette Valley, runs from south to north following the Willamette River from Eugene to Portland.

Topography

As opposed to the Washington vineyards, most of the plantings are EAST of the Cascade mountains. Willamette, Umpqua and Rogue Valleys are protected to the west by the Coast Range of mountains and the Cascades to the east. The Columbia and Walla Walla appellations are semi-arid dessert regions in the eastern part of the state and the actual appellations cross the political boundaries into Washington State. Most of the vineyards are planted on low hills, like the Dundee Hills region, where the slopes can shed both cold air (frost) and excess water, both of which can harm the vines or reduce the quality of the grapes.

Climate

The vineyards of Oregon are marine influenced by the Pacific Ocean, with moderate temperatures and long, slow ripening cycles. Being exposed to the maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean means that Oregon is distinctly different than either California or Washington. Oregon is notoriously wet, which can lead to problems during harvest with wet or rotting grapes. Many vineyards are dry-farmed - relying on rainfall for moisture. As opposed to the Okanagan, Washington, and even Napa/Sonoma vineyards, frost is not a major problem for Oregon although late harvests can stretch into November.

Pests

Phylloxera is showing up in small patches, but most of Oregon's vineyards are widely dispersed and this pest finds it difficult to spread freely. Botrytis, due to the cooler and moister climate, can be a problem. While Botrytis is great for making dessert wines, not all grapes benefit and its widespread appearance in the vineyards is considered a problem.

Major Grape Varieties

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Gewurztraminer, Zinfandel, Muller-Thurgau, Sauvignon Blanc

Successes

Pinot Noir and Chardonnay dominate the literature and the interest in Oregon wine with much interest in Pinot Gris as well. Pinot Noir, although producing some of Oregon's finest wines, is a trial to winemakers and production is often less than 1 ton per acre as compared to California's 5 tons per acre or more. No wonder Oregon Pinot Noir tends to be a little more expensive!