

WINE OVERVIEW



WASHINGTON

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Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

Washington state is a premium wine producing region located in the Northwest corner of the United States. Although a relatively young wine industry, it is the nation's second largest wine producer and is ranked among the world's top wine regions. Washington wines are found nationally in all 50 states and internationally in more than 40 countries.

Washington's first wine grapes were planted at Fort Vancouver by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1825. By 1910, wine grapes were growing in many areas of the state, following the path of early settlers. French, German and Italian immigrants pioneered the earliest plantings. Wine historians Ron Irvine and Dr. Walter Clore document in their book *The Wine Project* a continuous and connected effort to cultivate wine grapes beginning with those early plantings at Fort Vancouver. Hybrid varieties arrived in nurseries in the Puget Sound region as early as 1854, and by 1860, wine grapes were planted in the Walla Walla Valley.

The first commercial-scale plantings began in the 1960s. The efforts of the earliest producers, predecessors to today's Columbia Winery and Chateau Ste. Michelle, attracted the attention of wine historian Leon Adams. Adams in turn introduced pioneering enologist Andre Tchelistcheff to Chateau Ste. Michelle. It was Tchelistcheff who helped guide Chateau Ste. Michelle's early efforts and mentored modern winemaking in this state. The resulting rapid expansion of the industry in the mid 1970s is now rivaled by today's breakneck pace, where a new winery opens nearly every 15 days.

With 43,000 acres planted, the state has ideal geography and conditions for growing premium vinifera wine grapes. Primarily grown on their own root stocks, which support healthier plants, vines produce grapes of consistent quality, resulting in strong vintages year after year. While wine grape growers in Washington focus on Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah, the region also produces a wide range of other spectacular white and red wines.

As the state's fourth largest fruit crop, the Washington wine industry is an important contributor to the long-term preservation of Washington agriculture. The industry is committed to sustainable agricultural practices and conservation of water resources. Washington is also home to wineries that are certified organic and biodynamic.

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THE GROWING SEASON

Washington is one of the highest latitude wine regions in the world. Similar areas elsewhere tend to be on the cusp of cool, rainy weather in the spring and fall, making viticulture difficult – especially at sensitive times like harvest. Eastern Washington is dry enough to be categorized as a Continental Semi-Desert. The north south running Olympic and Cascade Mountain ranges in the Western portion of the state combine to stop the clouds rolling in off of the Pacific Ocean - known as a Rain Shadow Effect.

While the growing season is slightly shorter from beginning to end than more southerly wine regions, the number of sun hours received in Eastern Washington is equal to a full season due to incredibly long days at such a high latitude – receiving up to 17-and-a half hours of sun each day. There are no clouds 300 days of the year, coupled with high light intensity due the northern hemisphere’s closer proximity to the sun. The angle of the sun is similar to the great wine regions of Northern Europe, as they share similar latitudes.

Only 7 to 12 inches rain falls in Eastern Washington. However, Eastern Washington has the good fortune of having incredible water sources to rely on for irrigation in such an arid region. This allows absolute control as to when the vine is given moisture and how much is given, which contributes to grape ripeness,



Mimi Nye of Chateau Ste. Michelle

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GROWING REGIONS

Washington has 12 AVAs covering over 30,000 acres of vineyard land. Eleven of these AVAs are located in Eastern Washington, the largest of all being the Columbia Valley AVA. The Columbia Valley AVA along with the Columbia Gorge and Walla Walla AVAs cover both Washington and Oregon.

All of these locations vary from 100 feet above sea level to 1,000 above sea level with all degrees of aspect to the sun. Several of these regions are smaller AVA’s located inside larger ones, recognizing the diverse microclimates and soil types for a specific area. There are cool sites, warm sites, wetter sites, windy sites, hilly sites, flat sites all providing different ripening cycles and styles of wine.

YAKIMA VALLEY -ESTABLISHED 1983

- **Washington State's first federally-recognized appellation; includes more than 60 wineries.**
- Contains 16,042 vineyard acres (6,492 hectares), over one third of Washington's vineyards.
- Most widely planted grape is Chardonnay, followed by Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Riesling and Syrah represent significant acreage, with Syrah in particular on the rise.
- Silt-loam soils predominate allowing proper drainage necessary to keep vine's vigor under control.
- 190-day growing season with annual precipitation of approximately 8 inches (20 cm).

WALLA WALLA VALLEY - ESTABLISHED 1984

- Grape growing began in the Walla Walla Valley in the 1850s by Italian immigrants.
- Contains nearly 100 wineries and more than 1,600 acres (648 hectares) of vineyards.
- Cabernet Sauvignon is the leading varietal while Merlot, Chardonnay and Syrah are other predominant varieties. Gewurztraminer, Cabernet Franc, Sangiovese, Grenache, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Tempranillo, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillion, and Viognier are also grown.
- Loess derived soils, which are essentially unconsolidated, unstratified calcareous silt.
- Growing season of 190 to 220 days, with annual rainfall averaging 12.5 inches (32 cm) per year.

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COLUMBIA VALLEY - ESTABLISHED 1984

- Washington's largest viticultural region, covering almost 11 million acres (4,451,700 hectares), which represents a full third of Washington state's land mass.
- The Columbia Valley contains 99% of wine grapes grown in Washington State - 40,050 acres (16,207 hectares).
- 6,851 vineyard acres (2,772.7 hectares) of wine grapes are planted in the Columbia Valley AVA and not included in any other sub-AVAs in Washington.
- Columbia Valley's vast size allows for a number of meso- and micro-climates.
- Vineyards are planted on predominately south-facing slopes, increasing solar radiation in summer and promoting air drainage in winter.
- **Riesling, Merlot, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon are the most widely planted varietals.**
- Growing season of 180-200 days with annual rainfall averaging 6 to 8 inches (15-20 cm).
- The Columbia Valley contains the American Viticultural Regions of Red Mountain, Yakima and Walla Walla Valleys, Wahluke Slope, Rattlesnake Hills, Horse Heaven Hills, Snipes Mountain, and Lake Chelan within its borders.

PUGET SOUND - ESTABLISHED 1995

- 69 vineyard acres (28 hectares) of vinifera grapes planted.
- There are approximately 45 wineries located within the greater Puget Sound region.
- The temperate climate rarely suffers from prolonged freezes in winter and enjoys long mild and dry summers.
- The core area of this appellation has a growing season that is drier and sunnier than many classic wine grape growing regions in Europe.
- Semi-permeable cemented subsoil allows the deep-rooted vinifera vines to survive the late summer soil water deficit.
- Precipitation averages 15 inches (38 cm) to 30 inches (76 cm) per year, mostly falling in the winter dormant season, with a growing season of over 180 days.
- Madeleine Angevine, Siegerebbe and Muller-Thurgau are the predominant varietals.
- Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir also show promise in this appellation.

RED MOUNTAIN - ESTABLISHED 2001

- Established in 2001, located on the eastern edge of the Yakima Valley.
- Not necessarily a mountain, more of a steep slope, which faces southwest near the Yakima River.
- Over 1,199 vineyard acres currently planted in the 4,040 acre area.
- More than 15 wineries are located in the Red Mountain AVA, with many additional Washington wineries sourcing grapes from Red Mountain's premiere growers.
- Primary grape varieties planted include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Sangiovese, Malbec, and Petit Verdot.
- The area has a desert climate with average yearly rainfall of five inches per year. During the growing season daytime temperatures average 90 °F (32 °C) with night time temperatures dropping below 50 °F (10 °C).

COLUMBIA GORGE - ESTABLISHED IN 2004

- Includes areas in Washington State and Oregon with more than 20 wineries.
- Area of Columbia Gorge AVA is 191,000 acres, approximately 300 square miles.
- Approximately 500 planted acres of vinifera.
- Located within a National Scenic Area, sixty miles east of Portland/Vancouver.
- The Columbia Gorge wine region is defined by the Columbia River Gorge, a narrow passage that marks the dramatic transition from eastern desert to cool maritime climate as the Columbia River cuts through the Cascade Mountain Range on its way to the Pacific Ocean.

• The region encompasses the corridor flanking the river in both Washington and Oregon and includes the Columbia Gorge and the southwestern part of the Columbia Valley American Viticultural Areas (AVAs).

- Within the compact area of the Columbia Gorge lays an extraordinary combination of climate, soil and geology creating distinctly different "micro-climates" perfect for growing premium grapes of almost every variety from Albarino to Zinfandel.
- Passing through the Columbia Gorge from west to east, the rainfall diminishes at almost an inch per mile while sunshine increases dramatically.
- Western vineyards have a cool, marine influenced climate where it rains 40 inches a year -- ideal for cool-weather loving varieties like Pinot Noir, Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Riesling.
- Eastern vineyards have a continental high desert climate with just 10 inches of annual rainfall but plentiful sunshine to ripen hot-weather Bordeaux, Rhone and Italian varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel and Barbera.
- Soils vary just as dramatically as the rain and sunshine; from red from old volcanic mudstone to gray showing fragments of basalt rock.
- Vineyard altitudes vary from near sea level to close to 2000'.

HORSE HEAVEN HILLS - ESTABLISHED IN 2005

- Naturally bounded on the north by the Yakima Valley appellation and on the south by the Columbia River.
- Located in Southeast Washington - total area is 570,000 acres (230,679 hectares) of which about 10,130 acres (4,099 hectares) are planted to grapes, representing 25% of Washington's total grape production.
- Primary grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Syrah with 37 total varieties planted.
- Proximity to the Columbia River creates 30% more wind while moderating temperature extremes, providing steep south-facing slopes for optimum vineyard locations and providing well-drained, sandy-loam soils.
- Elevations range from 1,800 feet at the area's northern boundary to 300 feet at its southern.
- Outstanding sites that have been developed in this area include Alder Ridge, Andrews-Horse Heaven Vineyard, Canoe Ridge, Champoux Vineyards and Wallula Gap Vineyard.
- Growers have raised grapes in the Horse Heaven Hills region since 1972.
- There are at least 25 vineyards and 6 commercial wineries with 1 tasting room within the region.
- Proud source of the 1st, 2nd & 3rd "100 point" wines in the State of Washington.

WAHLUKE SLOPE - ESTABLISHED IN 2006

- Naturally bounded by the Columbia River to the west and south, by the Saddle Mountains on the north, and on the east by the Hanford Reach National Monument.
- The Wahluke Slope AVA lies entirely within the established Columbia Valley appellation and is home to more than 20 vineyards and at least three wine production facilities.
- The 81,000 acre (32,780 hectares) region features approximately 5,652 acres (approximately 2,100 hectares) of vineyards: nearly 15 percent of the total wine grape acreage in the state.
- Top grape varieties: Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Chenin Blanc.
- Wahluke Slope has one of the driest, warmest climates in the state, allowing nearly complete control of vine vigor and ripening through irrigation.

RATTLESNAKE HILLS - ESTABLISHED IN 2006

- Located approximately four miles southeast of Yakima, the 68,500 acre (27,721 hectares) appellation has 1,566 acres (634 hectares) under vines.
- With 17 wineries and 29 vineyards, it provides many Washington producers with Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay and Riesling.
- Encompassing an expanse of hills running east to west along the northern point of the Yakima River and south of Moxee Valley, the Rattlesnake Hills AVA lies within both the established Columbia Valley and Yakima Valley appellations.
- Beginning at an elevation of 850 feet and rising up to 3,085 feet, the viticultural area sits higher in elevation than the surrounding Yakima Valley region.
- The first commercial vineyards in the region date back to 1968.
- Vineyards are typically located on ridges and terraces and in areas with good air drainage to avoid late spring and early fall frost and winter kill.

SNIPES MOUNTAIN - ESTABLISHED 2009

- In the 1850s a rancher named Ben Snipes built a house and settled his cattle operation on a Yakima Valley mountain north of the Yakima River, later known as Snipes Mountain.
- In 2009 the Snipes Mountain AVA became Washington State's 10th official viticultural area, named after its most prominent landmark, but also including eastern neighbor Harrison Hill.
- Both slopes, encompassing 4,145 acres, share similar rocky soils and elevation levels and are planted with 759 acres of commercial grapes.
- Snipes Mountain is the second smallest AVA in Washington, bigger only than Red Mountain, and home to six wineries. Its vineyards grow more than 30 different wine grape varieties and the fruit is used in more than 25 wineries.
- Vineyards have been planted on Snipes Mountain and Harrison Hill since 1914, and Washington State's second oldest Cabernet Sauvignon vines have been producing grapes on Harrison Hill for more than 40 years.
- While the Snipes Mountain AVA lies entirely within the boundaries of the Yakima Valley AVA its uniqueness comes from an elevated topography and unique soils not found elsewhere in the Yakima Valley AVA.

“ There are almost 25,000 vineyard acres of red wine varieties statewide. ”



LAKE CHELAN - ESTABLISHED 2009

- Lake Chelan, one of Washington's most sought after summer destinations, is now the 11th American Viticultural Area (AVA) officially recognized in the state.
- It is encompassed completely within the larger Columbia Valley AVA, but Lake Chelan has a higher elevation and more temperate climate than the more southern AVAs also contained within the Columbia Valley.
- The 24,040-acre Lake Chelan AVA includes the southern and eastern portions of land surrounding the lake and shares a northern border with the Columbia Valley AVA.
- Due to the ice age glaciers that formed Lake Chelan, the soil surrounding it has distinctive properties such as coarse, sandy sediment with notable amounts of quartz and mica, and these result in grapes with discernable textures, minerals, and nutrients.
- The AVA is also distinguished by a significant "lake effect" that creates mild and favorable temperatures for surrounding areas, resulting in a longer growing season and a reduced risk of frost.
- Grapes have been grown in the Chelan Valley since before the turn of the 20th century by a few Native Americans and a group of Italian immigrants. In 1949, the area produced grapes from 154 vineyard acres.
- Modern wine grape growing began more extensively at the turn of the 21st century, and the first winery was opened by the Kludt family in 2000. Now the area is home to 15 wineries and about 227 acres of planted grapes.
- The leading varieties being produced in the new AVA include Syrah, Merlot, Malbec, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir.

NACHES HEIGHTS - ESTABLISHED 2012

- Naches Heights became the 12th AVA in Washington State in 2012
- Currently there are about 40 acres planted to wine grapes in Naches Heights, but the AVA encompasses 13,254 acres in total.
- The first grapes planted in the Naches Heights were Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Syrah in 2002.
- Located within the Columbia Valley on an ancient volcanic bedrock plateau, Naches Heights is above the level of the Missoula Floods, at elevations ranging from 1,200 to 2,100 feet.
- The boundaries of the Naches Heights are the Naches River to the north and east, Cowiche Creek to the south and west, and the lower Tieton River on the west.
- The soil is comprised of windblown soil, also known as loess, which is heavy in clay and helps the soil to retain water. Around 10 to 13 inches of rain fall annually in the Naches Heights region. It is considered a cooler region for Washington State.

THE VINES

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Eastern Washington is one of the very few world class growing regions on earth that does not have to graft its vines onto rootstock. Phylloxera (*dactylasphaera vitifolia*), an aphid that damages roots by feeding on them and leaving them prey to disease and nutrient deficiencies - enough to kill the host vine, cannot exist in this area. It exists in 95% of the world's quality wine regions. Common vineyard fungal disease such as Oidium (powdery mildew), Peronosperal (downy mildew) and Grey/black rot require a humid environment. Due to its arid climate, Eastern Washington is remarkably fungus free; as a result, very few chemical based anti-fungicides are required, leading to sustainable vineyard practices that leave vibrant, healthy, lively soils and water sources. As a result, the wines are 100% the grape variety planted on original disease free rootstock - and that much more profound for it.

WHITE GRAPES

There are more than 18,850 vineyard acres of white wine varieties statewide. Those most common in Washington are:

RIESLING 6,320 acres-One of the first grape varieties grown in Washington, the state's Rieslings tend to be very floral in the nose, with vivid apricot, peach and apple flavors. Occasionally, the "noble rot" works

its magic on Riesling, concentrating the sugars and flavors to produce a late-harvest wine of incomparable intensity. When the conditions are right, Washington vintners also produce incredible ice wines from Riesling, as well as other varietals. Most Washington Rieslings are made in a dry to off-dry style to accompany food.

CHARDONNAY 7,654 acres-Chardonnay is one of the best manifestations of the state's special winemaking character. While the varietal is noted in many other regions as a rich and powerful wine, Washington Chardonnays are often distinctively crisp and delicate, like fresh apples. Oak is often used with a lighter touch, showing off the varietal character. Also, some wineries use secondary malolactic fermentation to add rich vanillin and buttery nuances.

SAUVIGNON BLANC 1,173 acres-These grapes make wines that appear under two names-Sauvignon Blanc and Fumé Blanc. They are becoming increasingly popular for their distinctive character and are often described as fruity with a touch of herbaceousness and lively acidity. Styles range from slightly tart and grassy to tangy pineapple overlaid with oak.

GEWÜRZTRAMINER 775 acres-An early Washington success story because of its ability to withstand the cold winters, Gewürztraminer typically offers allspice, tropical fruit with zesty aromas and flavors. Previously made only in an off-dry, or slightly sweet style, Gewürztraminer is now being explored by Washington winemakers in dry styles that retain its rich aromatics.

SEMILLON 222 acres-Washington is known for its Semillon, and while this wine is most often enjoyed young, Washington Semillons are known to age beautifully into rich, honeyed, nutty wines. When young, it offers a broad spectrum of flavors, ranging from crisp citrus to melon and fig, and fresh pears to vanillin. A wine with somewhat lower acidity than Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon is luscious, yet light. Its lower acidity makes it more susceptible to botrytis, resulting in a fair number of late-harvest bottlings.

White Varieties of Note: Pinot Gris, Viognier, Chenin Blanc, Rousanne, Mueller-Thurgau, Madeline Angevine, Siegerrebe, Muscat Ottonel, Orange Muscat, Muscat Canelli, Aligote

RED GRAPES

There are almost 25,000 vineyard acres of red wine varieties statewide. Those most common in Washington are:

CABERNET SAUVIGNON 10,293 acres - The king of the red grapes grows magnificently in Washington. The heady, fruity character of this complex grape develops slowly. In its youth, the wine appears more subtle and restrained than Washington Merlots. Its character can emerge as black currants, cherry, berry, chocolate, leather, mint, herbs, bell pepper or any combination of these. This wine ages beautifully. Frequently, several years of bottle aging are needed for the wine to show at its best. Many of the state's vintners employ traditional blending practices, adding Merlot or Cabernet Franc to the wine.

MERLOT 8,235 acres - Washington Merlot, with its cherry flavors and aroma, tends to be more full-bodied, moderately tannic and slightly higher in alcohol than its Bordeaux cousins, and higher in acidity than those from California. Traditionally used in blends, Merlot gained popularity bottled on its own in the early 1970s. It captured center stage as Washington's star varietal almost 15 years after its first commercial release in 1976. Washington Merlot is known for its sweet cherry and berry flavors and complex aromas that include mint, cigar box, and sweet spices like nutmeg and cardamom.

SYRAH 3,103 acres - A relative newcomer to Washington State, the Syrah grape has seen a substantial increase in acreage in the past few years. Syrah is just one of the Rhone varieties gaining popularity in Washington State. A spicy, rich, complex varietal, Syrah grapes turn into big, dark, intensely concentrated wines with aromas and flavors of blackberries, black currants, roasted coffee, tobacco and leather.

CABERNET FRANC 972 acres - Long considered primarily a blending grape, Cabernet Franc has recently captured the attention of Washington's winemakers. A hardy grape, Cabernet Franc has been of primary value for the sturdy core and firm tannins it adds to softer wines. On its own, it offers delicious, spicy notes with mellow coffee and intense blueberry fruit. Washington vineyard acreage devoted to Cabernet Franc has grown six-fold in the past few years.

Other Red Varieties of Note: Malbec, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, Lemberger (Blue Franc), Grenache, Zinfandel, Barbera, Petit Verdot, Nebbiolo, Mouverdre, Petite Syrah