

Sidebar

Drinks · Wine Cheat Sheet

Styles, grapes, label terms, and the numbers that actually matter — enough to order, taste, and store with confidence.

WINE STYLES

- Red** Fermented with grape skins — tannin and color come from contact time
- White** Skins removed before fermentation, even from red-skinned grapes
- Rosé** Brief skin contact, then removed — pink color, not a red/white blend
- Sparkling** A second fermentation traps CO2 (Champagne, Cava, Prosecco)
- Fortified** Spirit added, raising ABV (Port, Sherry, Madeira)
- Dessert** High residual sugar, often from late-harvest or botrytized grapes

COMMON RED GRAPES

- Cabernet Sauvignon** Full-bodied, high tannin, blackcurrant, ages well
- Merlot** Softer, rounder, plum and chocolate notes
- Pinot Noir** Light-bodied, high acidity, red fruit, notoriously hard to grow
- Syrah / Shiraz** Bold, peppery, dark fruit — same grape, different regional name
- Sangiovese** Italy's Chianti grape — high acidity, cherry, earthy
- Malbec** Dark, fruity, associated with Argentina (originally French)

COMMON WHITE GRAPES

- Chardonnay** Ranges bone-dry/steely to rich/buttery depending on oak use
- Sauvignon Blanc** High acidity, crisp, grassy/citrus notes
- Riesling** Very high acidity; ranges bone-dry to very sweet — check the label
- Pinot Grigio / Gris** Same grape — Italian style lighter, Alsatian style richer
- Moscato** Aromatic, low alcohol, usually sweet, often lightly sparkling

READING A LABEL

- Vintage** Year the grapes were harvested, not bottled
- Appellation / AOC** A legally defined growing region — often implies the grape too
- Estate Bottled** Grown, made, and bottled by the same producer
- Reserve** No fixed legal meaning in most countries — a producer's own claim
- Old World** Europe — labels favor place name over grape (e.g. "Bordeaux")
- New World** Americas, Australia, NZ, S. Africa — labels favor the grape name

TASTING TERMS

- Tannin** Dry, gripping sensation from skins/seeds/oak — mainly in reds
- Acidity** The tart, mouth-watering sensation — not the same as sweetness
- Body** How light or heavy a wine feels, roughly like skim vs. whole milk
- Dry** Little to no residual sugar — the opposite of sweet, not of fruity
- Finish** How long the flavor lingers after swallowing
- Legs** Streaks on the glass — indicate alcohol/sugar, not quality

SERVING TEMPERATURES

- Sparkling** 6–8°C (43–47°F) — coldest of all
- White** 7–13°C (45–55°F) — crisper whites colder, richer whites warmer
- Rosé** 7–10°C (45–50°F)
- Light Red** 13–16°C (55–60°F) — e.g. Pinot Noir, chill slightly
- Full-Bodied Red** 16–18°C (60–65°F) — just below room temperature

FOOD PAIRING BASICS

- High acid wine** Pairs well with rich, fatty, or creamy food
- High tannin red** Pairs well with fatty red meat — protein softens tannin
- Sweet wine** Should be at least as sweet as the dessert it's served with
- Delicate dish** Pair with a delicate wine so neither one overpowers the other

OPENED BOTTLE: HOW LONG IT LASTS

- Sparkling** 1–3 days (use a sealed stopper, not a regular cork)
- White / Rosé** 2–4 days, refrigerated
- Red** 3–5 days — refrigerate too, despite the "serve at room temp" advice
- Fortified** 2–4 weeks — higher alcohol slows oxidation

"CORKED" DOESN'T MEAN BITS OF CORK IN YOUR GLASS

A wine is "corked" when a compound called TCA has contaminated the cork, giving the wine a wet-cardboard or damp-basement smell — a genuine fault, not just a broken or crumbly cork. Real cork sediment or a loose cork is harmless; a musty, flat smell instead of the wine's own real aroma is the actual sign to send a bottle back.