

Austria

Austria is best known for the quality of its dry white wines, both from its own grape variety **Grüner Veltliner**, and from **Riesling**. However, Austria is also home to many fine red wines made from the local varieties such as **Zweigelt** and **Blafränkisch** and sweet botrytised dessert wines made from **Welschriesling**.

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CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

The Alps cover the western parts of Austria and consequently the wine producing areas are found at the eastern end of the country. These vineyard areas have a cool continental climate, with short summers and very harsh winters. The more northerly regions can experience cooling northerly winds, whereas those closest to the Hungarian border are warmed by easterly winds. There is much less variation in annual weather patterns than in northern Europe.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND WINEMAKING

White Grape Varieties

The most widely planted variety is **Grüner Veltliner**, a high-quality grape that has given Austria a point of difference in export markets. It tends to produce fresh but unexciting wines if yields become too high, but when grown with care it is capable of producing full-bodied, concentrated wines with naturally high acidity. In youth it often gives flavours of citrus or stone fruit, sometimes with hints of white pepper, and develops layers of honey and toast as the wine ages. The majority of producers ferment and store their wines in stainless steel, however, old oak casks are also commonly used, and some producers may mature a proportion of their best wines in new oak *barriques*.

The second most planted white variety is

Welschriesling (note this is not the same grape variety as **Riesling**). When produced in a dry style its wines are usually fresh but simple, displaying citrus and green apple flavours and high acidity. However, due to its susceptibility to botrytis it is also capable of producing high-quality dessert wines.

Riesling is less widely planted and the best examples tend to come from Wachau, Kamptal and Kremstal. These are usually dry and medium- to full-bodied, with ripe, peachy primary fruit. The best examples are capable of maturing in bottle.

Other widely planted varieties are Chardonnay, Müller-Thurgau and Sauvignon Blanc, the last of which has a growing reputation particularly in the southern region of Steiermark.

Black Grape Varieties

The most widely planted black variety is **Zweigelt** (**Blafränkisch** × **St Laurent**) which gives very deeply coloured reds with soft tannins and bramble fruit.

Blafränkisch, which is the most highly regarded of the Austrian black varieties, produces wines with medium tannins, high acidity and a peppery, sour cherry flavour.

St Laurent is an Austrian speciality that gives wines similar in character to Pinot Noir. Oak ageing is common

AUSTRIAN WINE LAWS

The vast majority of wine made in Austria is PDO. PGI wines are labelled *Landwein* and wines without a geographical indication are labelled *Wein*.

PDO Wines

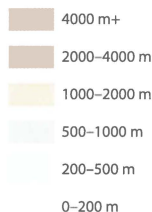
There are four federal states and a further 16 smaller areas that qualify for PDO status. These can either have the status *Qualitätswein* or DAC.

Qualitätswein – The four federal states and seven of the smaller areas are designated for the production of *Qualitätswein*. Wines can be made from 35 permitted grape varieties and the wines can be made in any style.

A *Qualitätswein* may also be labelled with a **Prädikat** level. This labelling system works in the same way as the *Prädikatsweine* that exist in Germany. In Austria these terms are mainly reserved for medium-sweet and sweet wines and there are two additional *Prädikate*. These are *Ausbruch*, which is a classification between *Beerenauslese* (BA) and

Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA), and *Strohwein* or *Schilfwein*, where bunches of grapes are laid out on beds of straw or reeds during the winter, to concentrate sugars.

Districtus Austriae Controllatus (DAC) – Nine of the smaller wine regions have elected to become DAC. If the producers in a region can agree on a grape variety (or varieties), a style of wine (and a set of regulations to go with it) that they think best reflects their area, then the region can be awarded DAC status. Once this has happened, only wines that conform to this style can use the name of the appellation. Other wines made in these areas that do not conform to this style can only be labelled with the name of the relevant federal state.

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for these wines. A number of producers are blending these Austrian varieties with international varieties such as Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.

REGIONS AND WINES

For PDO wines, the four federal states are Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), Burgenland, Steiermark

(Styria), and Wien (Vienna). The first two account for the vast majority of production.

Niederösterreich (Lower Austria)

This is the largest of the regions for both production and exports. The majority of the vineyards lie on the banks of the Danube and further north towards the Slovak border. Of the eight sub-regions, **Wachau** is the most renowned for high-quality dry wines made from either Grüner Veltliner or Riesling. Steep, often terraced, south-facing vineyards next to the Danube maximise exposure to the sun, and allow Grüner Veltliner and Riesling grapes to develop highly concentrated flavours. To date, Wachau has not chosen to become a DAC and has instead relied on its own classification system. Kamptal DAC and Kremstal DAC lie just north of Wachau and produce wines in a similar style and quality from either Grüner Veltliner or Riesling.

Weinviertel DAC is Austria's largest vine-growing area and was the first Austrian DAC. The wines can only be made from Grüner Veltliner. There are two levels to this DAC. *Klassik* wines must be made in a light, fresh and fruity style with no discernible oak flavours. *Reserve* wines must have a higher minimum alcohol and are allowed to be matured in oak.

Burgenland

This region lies to the east of Austria, along the border with Hungary, and is best known for top-quality sweet wines and red wines. Dry whites are made too, principally from Pinot Blanc, Welschriesling, Grüner Veltliner and Chardonnay.

Wachau is situated in a steep-sided valley cut out by the River Danube.



Neusiedlersee, a vast shallow lake in the north of the province, is the key for sweet wine production in this region. The vineyards for sweet wine production are situated on the low-lying ground near the lake to benefit from autumn mists that come from the lake and the wetland regions on its margins. These are ideal conditions for botrytis, which can almost be guaranteed every year. Welschriesling is one of the most widely used grape varieties for these sweet wines.

The best red wines in Austria come from the higher ground away from the lake and in the hills further south. Zweigelt is the most widely planted variety. Other varieties including Blaufränkisch and St Laurent, and international varieties such as Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon are also grown. Neusiedlersee is a DAC for Zweigelt. There are three DACs for Blaufränkisch, the largest of which is Mittelburgenland.