



Wine
Country
Ontario™



winecountryontario.ca



“I was amazed.”

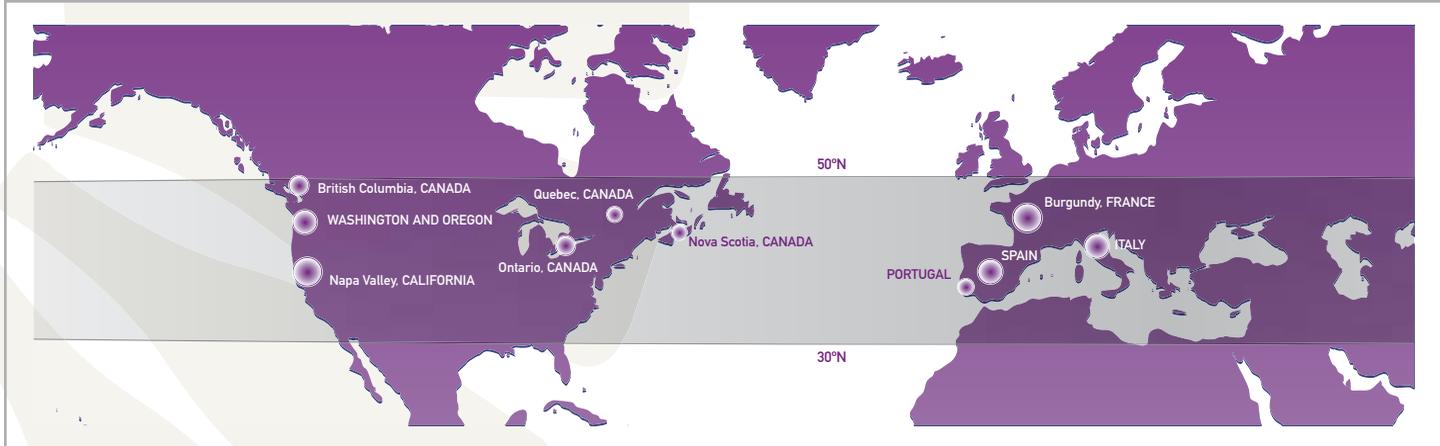
– Steven Spurrier

Latitude A Cool Climate Wine Region

Wine Country Ontario is situated between 41° and 44° North in the heart of the world's fine wine zone. This is the same latitude shared by Northern Italy and many other cool climate wine regions of Europe. The fluctuations in daily temperature over the course of the growing season create conditions critical to achieving a fine balance between acidity, alcohol and fruit expression. Wines from cooler climates are more aromatic, lighter in body and higher in acidity than those from hotter areas, providing refreshment, harmony with food and good ageing potential. 🍷

"Ontario's wines have such a particular beauty."

- Matt Kramer

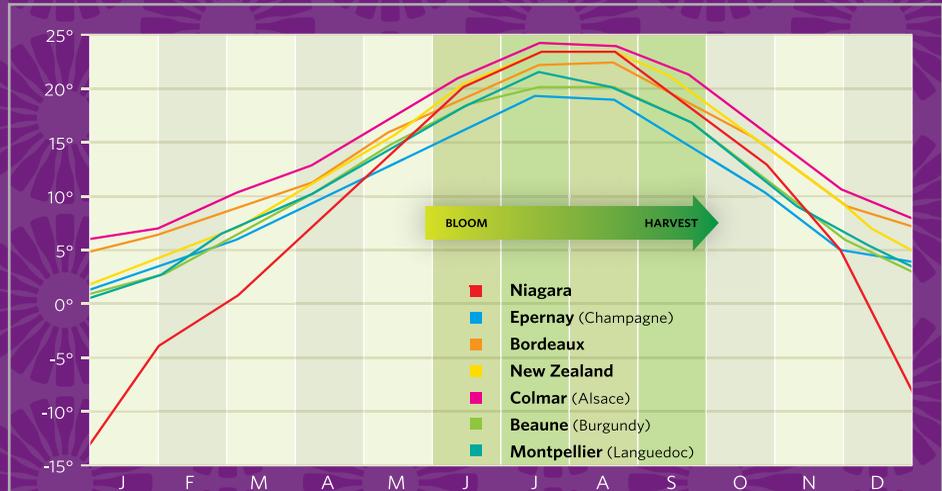


GROWING DEGREE DAYS MEASURED IN CELSIUS

DEFINED AS THE SUM OF THE MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE OVER 10°C (50°F) DURING THE GROWING SEASON (APRIL 1 - OCTOBER 31).

Geisenheim, Germany	1050
Epernay, France (Champagne)	1050
Hawke's Bay, New Zealand	1200
Northern Okanagan, British Columbia	1200
Prince Edward County, Ontario	1250
Roseburg, Oregon	1250
Beaune, France (Burgundy)	1315
Yakima, Washington	1426
Napa, California	1450
Southern Okanagan, British Columbia	1450
Niagara Peninsula, Ontario	1500
Lake Erie North Shore, Ontario	1528

Stretching across the southern part of the province, Ontario's vineyards are located near three of the Great Lakes – Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron. The lakes moderate cold winter temperatures and cool the vineyards during Ontario's hot summers. The soils in the Great Lakes basin vary from sand to clay to rock, with a high concentration of limestone from an ancient seabed that was exposed over a long period of glacial activity. Limestone is the same basic soil type also shared by Burgundy and other regions of northern France. Some of the vineyards lie flat on former seabed areas, others are perched on hills and benches that formed the ancient shoreline. The topography is ideal for water drainage (too much moisture can dilute flavours), and provides nutrients and minerality to the grapes. 🍷



The Growth Cycle

Bloom (June 10 - 18) to Harvest (October - November) matches other wine regions of the world, with 100 to 112 days.

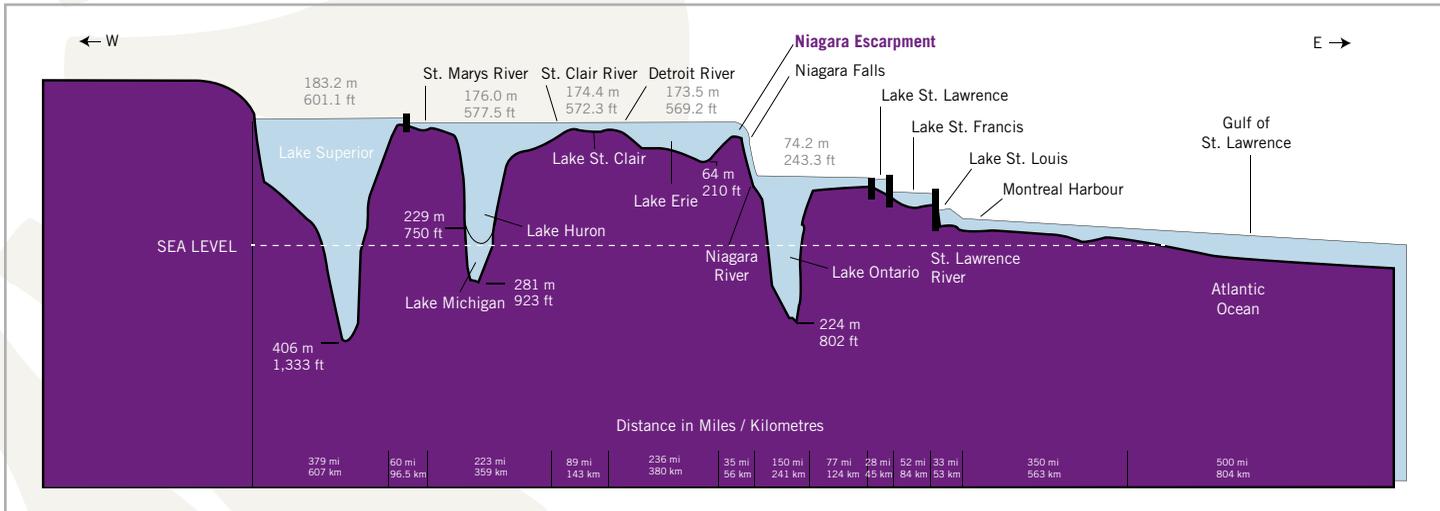
Lakes

Great Lakes System Profile

"We have taken Ontario's special terroir for granted for too long. Our combination of latitude, lakes and limestone is unique in the wine world."

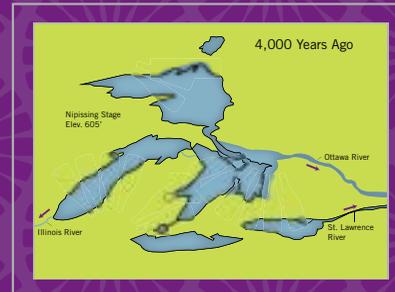
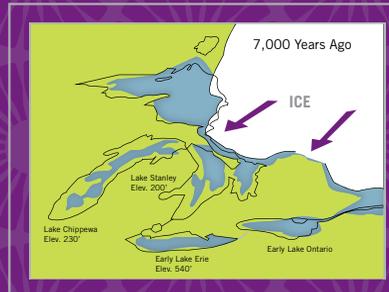
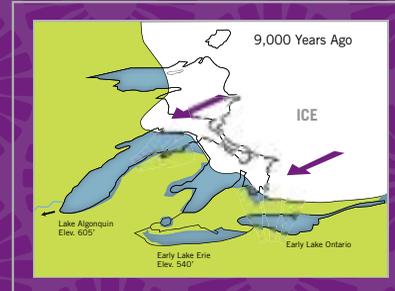
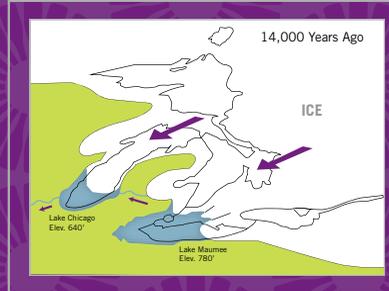
- David Lawrason

Three of the five Great Lakes of central North America – Lakes Huron, Erie and Ontario – have shaped Ontario's wine regions and play a major role in moderating the extremes of the region's continental climate. During the winter the lakes do not freeze, their warmer water helping protect their shoreline vineyards against vine-destroying deep freezes. During the summer their cooler waters moderate heat extremes; 30°C temperatures are not uncommon. ↻



Limestone Glacier & Soil

Through the ages Ontario experienced glacial events that shaped and eroded the layers of sedimentary rock and ancient reef structures, creating the Niagara Escarpment, which forms a spine across southern Ontario between Lakes Huron and Ontario. Where it runs along the south shore of Lake Ontario - forming the Niagara Peninsula - there are very complex soil structures. There are gradations and pockets of sand, gravel and clay over limestone bedrock packed into a band between the lake shoreline and the crest of the escarpment. Supporting Niagara's vineyards and orchards this band runs about 50 kms east-west at varying widths. The same glacial events affected Prince Edward County but left a virtual island of limestone bedrock exposed in Lake Ontario, with topsoil less than a metre deep in some places, while on the shore of Lake Erie the limestone runs deeper below mixed sand and clay soils.



The Great Lakes
Present day



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District

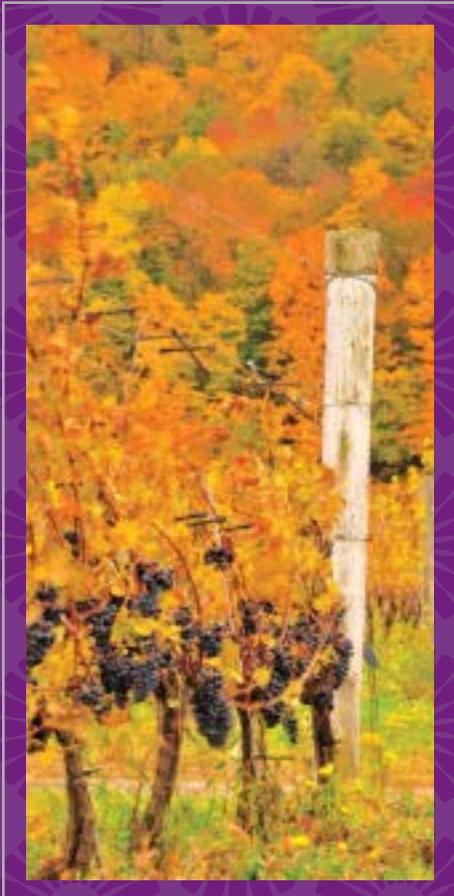
Wines of Origin Taste the Place

“There are some really lovely wines in Ontario, and that’s not an accident. You either have terroir or you don’t. The regions of Ontario have a “there there,” that is, a sense of identity tied to the place the wine is grown.”

– Allen Meadows

With the understanding of the region and growth of fine wine production, local wine has gained an important place in Ontario’s cultural landscape, and wines that have an appellation of origin have become increasingly important to wine drinkers. A wine appellation defines and maps a wine growing region or terroir – a place that combines climate, topography, geology and even local heritage. The terroir determines the choice of vine varieties and how those vines are cultivated, thus how the wines are made. As wineries interpret and elaborate the terroir, they in turn shape consumer tastes and interaction with the land. So Ontario’s finest wines – each with distinctive personality – are wines of origin, in Wine Country Ontario. 🍷





VQA Ontario | 100% Ontario grown



The Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) is a regulated appellation, or wine of origin system, patterned on models that have existed in Europe's great wine regions for over 60 years.

- Ontario VQA wines guarantee that 100% of the grape content for these wines comes from Ontario.
- VQA identifies three specific wine growing areas in Ontario – Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County. Another 10 sub-appellations were created within the Niagara Peninsula in 2005.
- Appellations of origin provide a deep sense of place as they remind us of a wine's inherent tie to the earth, nature, our ecology, and the winemakers and growers who live in those areas and strive to give their wines that sense of where they live.



Cool Climate Varieties Grow Best

NIAGARA VINTAGE CHART

- 2002 Very dry; warmer vintage.
- 2003 Moderate rainfall; moderate temperatures; cold winter reduced crops.
- 2004 Higher rainfall; cooler vintage; fabulous fall.
- 2005 Dry to moderate rainfall; warmer vintage; severe winter reduced crops.
- 2006 Higher rainfall; moderate temperatures.
- 2007 Extremely dry; warmer vintage.
- 2008 Moderate to high rainfall; moderate to cool temperatures.
- 2009 Moderate to high rainfall; cooler vintage.
- 2010 Ideal rainfall; long growing season; warmer vintage.
- 2011 Moderate to high rainfall; moderate to warm temperatures.
- 2012 Dry; warmer vintage.
- 2013 Higher rainfall; cooler vintage.

"Ontario alone can produce a vivid array of styles of Chardonnay, some of which can hold their own with the world's finest. This variety is very well suited to Canada I'd say."

- Jancis Robinson

Ontario's unique terroir is best showcased within key varieties that excel in cool climate regions, as they produce wines with exceptional fruit and balanced acidity. Most grape varieties used include many grapes of the species *vitis vinifera* (traditional in European and international winemaking). There are another eight "hybrid" varieties developed by crossing *vitis vinifera* varieties with more winter-hardy North American grape species. Although already known as a world leader for Icewine, Ontario remains somewhat undiscovered for its high-quality table wines and sparkling wines made from familiar grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir. 🍷





Primary White Varietals

Chardonnay | The most widely produced variety in Ontario is produced in different styles. Ontario Chardonnay naturally expresses substantial weight and richness with cool climate “tree fruit” aromas of apple, pear and peach. When fermented and aged in oak barrels expect added layers of wood spice, smokiness, and a touch of vanilla or butterscotch. Ontario’s natural acidity produces well-structured, firmer, more ageworthy Chardonnay than in many New World regions. Some can age well for over 10 years.

Riesling | One of the first *vinifera* varieties planted in Ontario, Riesling takes on classical Germanic character. It exhibits refreshing citrus, peach or floral aromas with a light “petrol” element and racy acidity. It is made in a range of dry, off-dry and sweet styles, including Icewine. Ontario Rieslings often age very well.

Other important varietals | **Sauvignon Blanc, Vidal Blanc, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer**



Primary Red Varietals

Cabernet Franc | This winter-hardy grape is one of the Bordeaux varieties, often blended with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon both in its homeland and here in Ontario. Alone it shows red currant, raspberry, herbal and tobacco characters, with oak ageing adding toasty, chocolaty complexity. It is made in early drinking unwooded styles, more structured cellar-worthy versions and, as Ontario has discovered, it can also make great Icewine.

Pinot Noir | The great red grape of Burgundy has a natural home in Ontario. Made in classic cool climate style, Pinot Noir renders wines with cherry fruit, earthy/forest floor and oak spice flavours. They are paler in colour, light to medium bodied and become silky smooth with a bit of age.

Other important varietals | **Gamay Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Baco Noir**

Passion in Our People

From the grape growing and winemaking pioneers of the 1970s to the rising stars of today, the Ontario wine industry works together to make world-class wines that can only come from the soils here in Ontario. Most vineyards are family-owned and many have generations working side by side. Committed to excellence, Ontario growers combine strong traditional agricultural values while investing in leading viticultural technology and know-how.

Ontario's winemakers are likewise focused on producing wines that typify grape character and the distinctive imprint of their region. They are increasingly immersed in all facets of production, from the cultivation, to the harvest, to the crushing, fermentation and ageing of wines in the cellar, and to helping tell the story of their wine in the marketplace. Clearly, the best wines are a unique reflection of a winemaker's passion, inspired by the origin and quality of the grapes grown. 🍇



"It's about the love of watching something grow."
– Trevor Falk

Leaders in Sustainability



Natural vineyard maintenance using sheep.



Southbrook - first winery building to receive the Gold level of LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) from the Canada Green Building Council.

The breadth of knowledge and experience within the industry helps our winemakers incorporate many techniques and practices that ensure wine quality and the sustainability of Ontario's vineyards and winemaking. Ontario wine grape growers and wine producers are stewards of our land - to ensure the continued viability of Ontario vineyards and wineries, the wine industry has adopted many environmental practices.

Sustainable Winemaking Ontario: An Environmental Charter for the Wine Industry is a proactive self-audit program that was created by the Wine Council of Ontario. This all-encompassing program was the first of its kind in Canada, and it focuses on all aspects of wine production - from vineyard water usage and wastewater, to energy conservation, pesticide use and community relations. The program encourages wineries to review day-to-day procedures and incorporate environmental, economical and social responsibilities into their daily operations.

Many Ontario vineyards and/or wineries are also biodynamic, organic, have built to LEED standards, use geothermal or solar heating, and participate in Local Food Plus and other environmental initiatives. Currently, plans are in place for a third-party certification program to be launched to standardize environmental practices and reinforce our commitment to a sustainable future. ♻️



Stratus - first building in Canada and the first winery worldwide to receive LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the Canada Green Building Council.

Ontario's Appellations

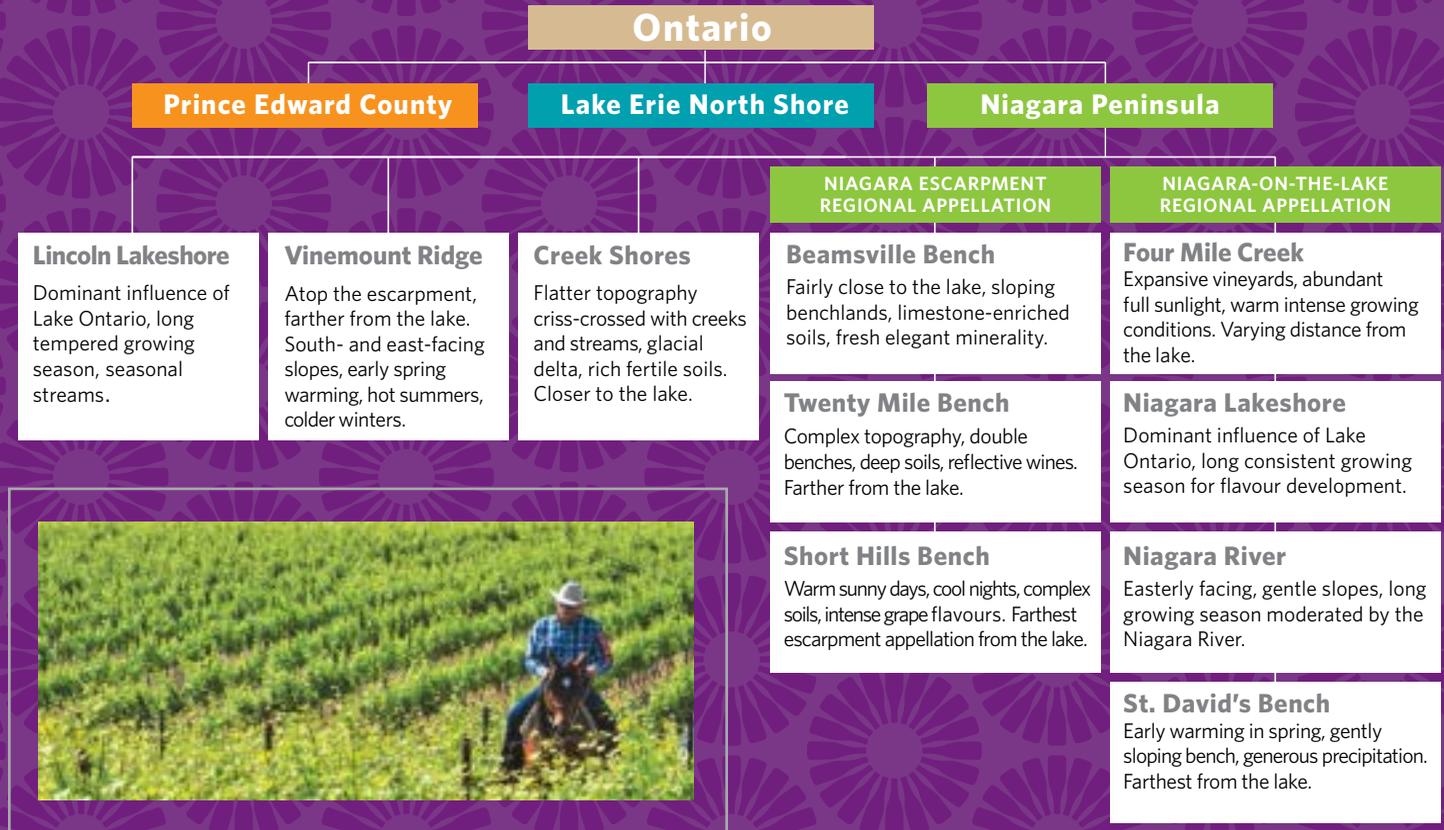
The majority of Canada's wines come from Ontario's appellations, where approximately 17,000 acres of wine grape vineyards are planted. As noted earlier, these lie in the south of the province between 41° and 44° North latitude, with cold winters and hot summers moderated by the proximity of the Great Lakes.

Ontario has so far identified three primary Viticultural Areas (VAs) or appellations of origin: Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County. Furthermore, within the Niagara Peninsula appellation, decades of grape growing experience and extensive geographic research has identified 10 distinct growing areas. These sub-appellations include areas on the plains close to Lake Ontario and the benchlands of the Niagara Escarpment. 🍷



Primary Appellations
Niagara Peninsula
Lake Erie North Shore
Prince Edward County

Ontario's Appellations | Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore & Prince Edward County



Niagara Peninsula Appellation Overview

Diverse terroir, sheltered slopes, lakeside vineyards,
a world of character in its wines

Niagara Peninsula

At 14,600 acres the Niagara Peninsula is the largest planted area of all *viticultural areas* in Canada.

Notable Features

The unique proximity of two prominent geographic features – Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment – creates a microclimate that occurs nowhere else in all of eastern North America.

QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1500

Frost-Free Days: 208 (-2°C)

Precipitation: 529 mm (April 1 to October 31)

Common Varietals: Riesling, Chardonnay, Merlot,
Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Gamay Noir

Situated on the south shore of Lake Ontario, Niagara has a diverse terroir of sheltered slopes, lakeside vineyards, mixed soils with a limestone base, and a world of character in its wines. The Niagara Escarpment – a limestone bluff that runs the length of the Peninsula – catches the on-shore moderating air from Lake Ontario and circulates it back down over the vineyards, enhancing the ripening of the grapes. Variations in the height of the escarpment and distance from the lake have resulted in the identification of 10 distinct sub-appellations with varying total heat units over the growing season, measured in degree days.

The classic cool climate varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Gamay Noir flourish here, and the region now boasts over 32 thriving varietals. The Niagara Peninsula continues to shape a rapidly expanding premium wine industry in Canada as the home to approximately 65% of Ontario's VQA wineries. 🍷



Climate Zones

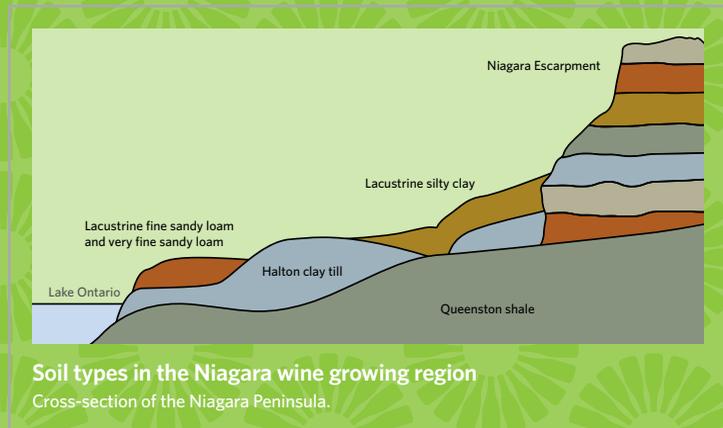
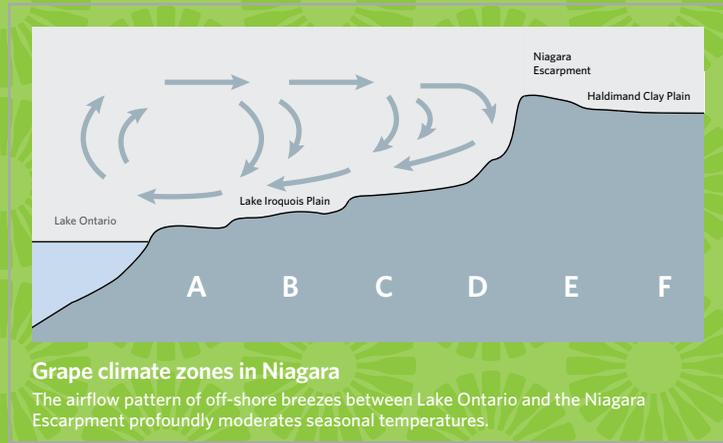
The macroclimate of the Niagara region is continental in nature with moderating effects from Lake Ontario, an enormous sea-like lake that moderates cold winter temperatures and cools the hot growing season.

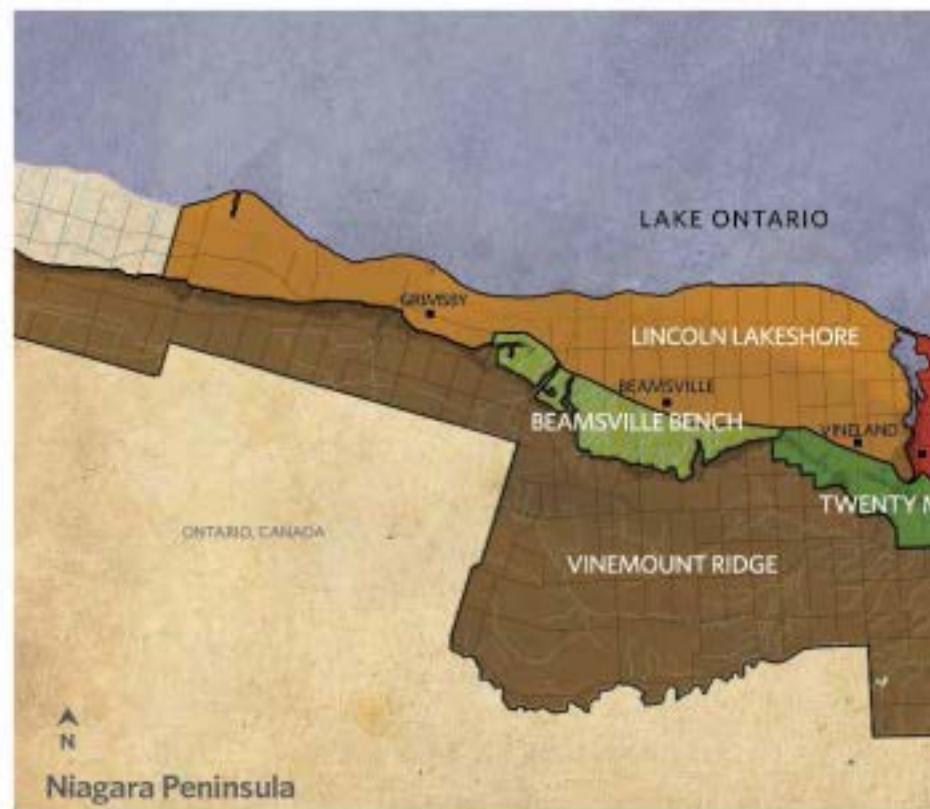
- A | Lakeshore effect zone
- B | Level plain between escarpment and lake
- C | Base of the escarpment, steep slope east of St. Catharines
- D | Steep north-facing escarpment slopes
- E | Slopes above the escarpment
- F | Flat and rolling land south of the escarpment

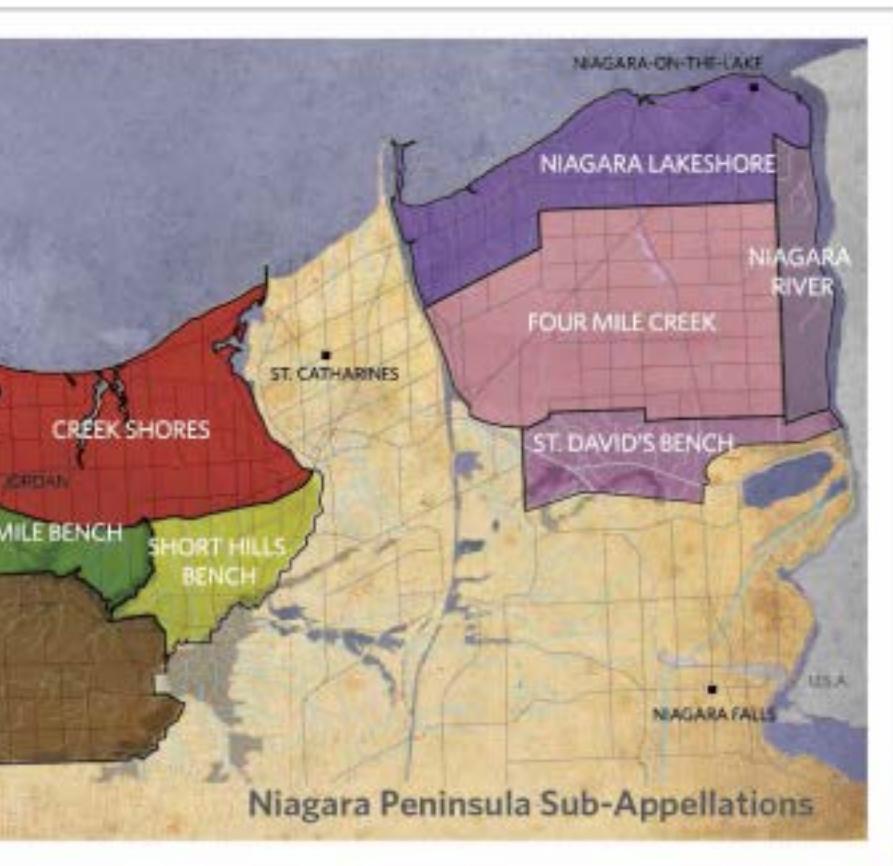
Topography and Soil

Niagara can be divided into three broad physiographic areas: the Lake Iroquois Plain, the Niagara Escarpment and the Haldimand Clay Plain. The Niagara Escarpment carves the length of this appellation, rising to some 91 m (300 ft) above Lake Ontario and 175 m (575 ft) above sea level, providing the slopes (determining sunlight) and elevations (influencing the breeze and lake effects) that distinguish unique terroirs.

Over the ages the Niagara Peninsula experienced several glacial events that eroded and shaped the layers of sedimentary rock and ancient reef structures of the Niagara Escarpment, creating complex soil compositions in the area between the escarpment and Lake Ontario.







Ontario's Appellations

Niagara Peninsula

- LINCOLN LAKESHORE
- VINEMOUNT RIDGE
- CREEK SHORES

Niagara Escarpment Regional Appellation

- BEAMSVILLE BENCH
- TWENTY MILE BENCH
- SHORT HILLS BENCH

Niagara-on-the-Lake Regional Appellation

- NIAGARA LAKESHORE
- FOUR MILE CREEK
- ST. DAVID'S BENCH
- NIAGARA RIVER

Lake Erie North Shore

- Prince Edward County

Niagara Escarpment

A Regional Appellation Up Close

Inspiring elevations, classic minerality, refreshing wines

Notable Features

The Niagara Escarpment is recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve and is the most prominent topographical feature of southern Ontario. This regional appellation draws together the three sub-appellations that share the fossil-rich sedimentary soils and dramatic topography adjacent to the escarpment ridge. The Niagara Escarpment supports a vital ecosystem, with hundreds of unique species of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and flora, including 37 types of wild orchids.

QUICK FACTS

Frost-Free Days: 205 (-2°C)

July Mean Temperature: 22.5°C

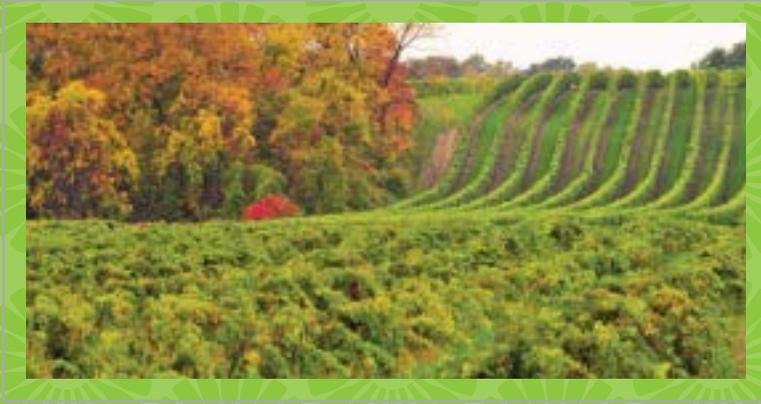
Precipitation: 543 mm (April 1 to October 31)

Common Varietals: Cabernet Franc, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay

Niagara Escarpment is one of two regional appellations within the Niagara Peninsula appellation. Regional appellations are a combination of smaller appellations with similar character and winemaking experience. Representing the benchlands along the Niagara Escarpment, west of St. Catharines to Grimsby, this complex region encompasses three sub-appellations: Short Hills Bench, Twenty Mile Bench and Beamsville Bench. The air circulation and frost protection provided by the bench topography and steady water supply define unique conditions for grape berry maturation across this region and contribute to the distinctive and refreshing style of bench wines. 🍷



Terroir | Niagara Escarpment



Climate

Sheltered from the stronger prevailing southwesterly winds by the Niagara Escarpment, and enjoying lake breezes reflected by the escarpment ridge, the benchland microclimate is well moderated throughout the year. With the higher elevation, temperatures warm gradually in the spring, encouraging later bud-burst and avoiding risks of frost. In the fall, the escarpment slopes trap warm lake air and allow for an extended season for grape maturation.

Topography

The benchlands begin below the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment, a prominent feature cutting across the Niagara Peninsula. Below the forested ridge, a myriad of north-facing slopes characterize this appellation. The topography ranges from a distinct bench in the west Beamsville Bench, backed by steep cliff faces, through a double bench in the Twenty Mile Bench, to undulating hills in the east Short Hills Bench. Another important topographic feature is the many streams and their tributaries whose headwaters rise from the escarpment. These streams have cut through the land, creating multiple slopes, and are important both as a groundwater source and to provide water drainage during the spring melt.

Soil

From highly variable soils consisting of water-stratified clay and silt to rich calcareous clay loam, most of this area's soils are deep and moderately drained with good water-holding capacities. Combined with groundwater flowing from the base of the escarpment during the dry summers, these soils provide steady moisture to vines throughout the growing season, while the slopes provide excellent natural drainage. The fossil-enriched sedimentary dolomites that underlie this appellation contribute to the distinct minerality found in many bench wines. 🍷

Niagara-on-the-Lake A Regional Appellation Up Close

Flatter topography, elegant vistas, spirited styles,
inviting wines of origin

Notable Features

Niagara-on-the-Lake is the heart of Ontario wine culture and a world-renowned wine country destination. The region is becoming well known for its annual celebrations of terroir-focused foods and wines.

QUICK FACTS

Frost-Free Days: 207 (-2°C)

July Mean Temperature: 22.6°C

Precipitation: 544 mm (April 1 to October 31)

Common Varietals: Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, Riesling, Pinot Noir

Niagara-on-the-Lake is one of two regional appellations within the Niagara Peninsula appellation. Regional appellations are a collection of appellations with similar character and winemaking experience. Situated below the crest of the Niagara Escarpment and stretching to the Niagara River and the shores of Lake Ontario, this region encompasses four sub-appellations: Niagara River, Niagara Lakeshore, Four Mile Creek and St. David's Bench. Although there is a great diversity in geology, soil composition, elevation and climate, the wineries of this appellation share the collective benefits of proximity to the lake, river and escarpment, which their wines reflect. 🍷



Terroir | Niagara-on-the-Lake

Climate

The geographical attributes of Niagara-on-the-Lake have a meaningful impact on climate. Proximity to the deep waters of Lake Ontario and the fast-flowing Niagara River moderates temperatures throughout the *viticultural region*, reducing the risk of late spring and early fall frosts. Vineyards farther from the lake receive somewhat less of the lake's moderating effects and thus experience a higher daily temperature range, with warm days and cool nights. Closer to the sheltering effects of the Niagara Escarpment spring warming occurs earlier, with sun exposure on east- and south-facing slopes promoting bud-burst and bloom.

Topography

Most of this region is lakeshore plains land, characterized by long, gentle slopes that become slightly more prominent in proximity to the north-facing Lake Iroquois Bluff. The gentle topography allows the entire region to enjoy generous sunlight exposure from early morning to late evening, which provides heat accumulation during the day and throughout the season, promoting an early start to the growing season. Clear, calm conditions often result in high daily temperature ranges and excellent growing conditions for grapes.

Soil

Ranging from sandy loam soils to soils primarily consisting of red shale with a high silt and clay content, water-holding capacities vary greatly within this region. Because of the gradual sloping of the landscape toward the lake, these soils tend to be moderately to well-drained with slow surface runoff. 🍷



Lake Erie North Shore Appellation Overview

Cool lake breezes, abundance of sunshine,
ripe fruit with good balance

Lake Erie North Shore

Stretching along the warm, shallow waters of Lake Erie, this southerly appellation affords its vines the most sunshine in Ontario, providing excellent ripening conditions for more full-bodied wines.

Notable Features

Plantings in Lake Erie North Shore are well developed close to the Lake Erie shoreline, where topographic and climatic conditions are particularly favourable and support full and balanced ripening of grapes.

QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1528

Frost-Free Days: 200 (-2°C)

Precipitation: 538 mm (April 1 to October 31)

Acreage: 1,100

Common Varietals: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon

Located at a latitude of approximately 42°N and stretching along the bow-shaped shoreline of Lake Erie from Amherstburg to south of St. Thomas, the Lake Erie North Shore appellation encompasses the vineyards in the southwestern extremity of Ontario. This favourable southerly location combined with the warming effect of the shallow waters of Lake Erie allows the vines to enjoy a long growing season and promotes ripe fruit with a perfect balance between natural sweetness and acidity. 🍷



Terroir | Lake Erie North Shore

Climate

Lake Erie North Shore has a long growing season. It benefits from the quick summer warming of the shallow waters of Lake Erie as well as from an abundance of sunshine during the growing season. Early harvests are the norm, with picking usually beginning at the end of August and late-harvest varieties often reaching their peak by late October.

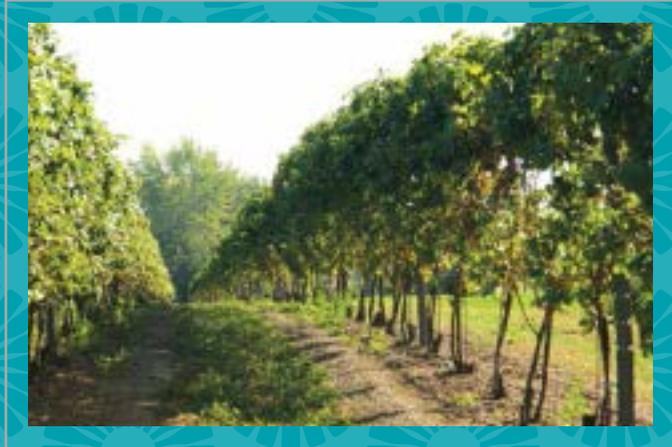
Topography

Bounded on the northwest side by Lake St. Clair, to the west by the fast-flowing Detroit River and to the south by Lake Erie.

Numerous short, shallow streams found throughout this appellation flow freely in the spring but often dry down to a trickle in the warm summer. The appellation is made up of long, gentle slopes that face in all directions, with elevations ranging from 172 m (564 ft) to 196 m (643 ft) above sea level. With no major topographic barrier to the prevailing southwesterly winds, this appellation enjoys the full effect of the lake breeze that moderates the entire area during the long growing season.

Soil

The soil composition was greatly affected by the glacial lakes, which deposited large amounts of unsorted stony materials in the area. When the glacial lakes elsewhere retreated, this area remained covered in deep waters for a longer period, allowing waves to smooth out the ridges and deposit considerable amounts of sediment. The light-textured, well-drained soils around the lakeshore contain mostly sandy loam and gravel deposits punctuated by small, irregular stony ridges, which overlie shale limestone bedrock. 🚲



Prince Edward County Appellation Overview

Limestone bedrock, stony soils, low yields,
excellent fruit concentration

Prince Edward County

Bordering Lake Ontario and the Bay of Quinte, Ontario's newest wine appellation is surrounded by water and features a rich terroir dominated by stony soils.

Notable Features

The broken limestone bedrock and stony soils of this appellation create excellent drainage in the spring and absorb water throughout the growing season, forcing vines to grow deeper during the hot summer months and producing lower yields of grapes with more concentrated flavours.

QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1250

Frost-Free Days: 194 (-2°C)

Precipitation: 561 mm (April 1 to October 31)

Acreage: 800

Common Varietals: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling

At a latitude of 44°N, Prince Edward County is Ontario's most northerly region, officially established in 2007 as a VQA appellation of origin. The County, as it is locally called, is a virtual island at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. Much of the appellation is separated from the mainland by the Bay of Quinte to the north, with the remainder surrounded by the waters of Lake Ontario. It relies on the lake to moderate its cooler climate. Its many bays, inlets and coves create more than 500 miles of shoreline, including the well-known Sandbanks Beach. The appellation also encompasses Amherst Island, a narrow strip off the mainland to the east. Overall, Prince Edward County is an appellation full of unique microclimate and soil conditions that provide the basis for the distinctiveness in its wines. 🍷



Terroir | Prince Edward County

Climate

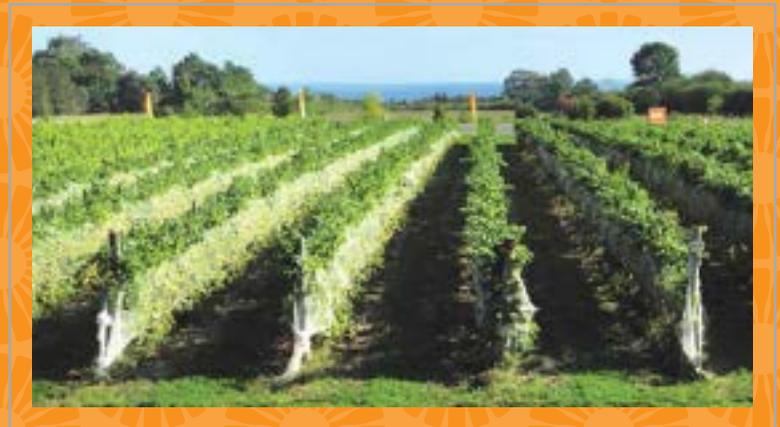
Most vineyards are located in areas that receive maximum benefit from lake breezes. Prevailing westerly breezes travel steadily across Lake Ontario and the Bay of Quinte to help moderate temperatures. They are especially beneficial during the warm summer months, keeping average temperatures around 22°C, with pleasant cooling during the hotter days and keeping cool nights at bay.

Topography

The County's topography is irregular, with hills creating various exposures for the vines, and valleys digging into the broad, flat Trenton limestone base. A gradual rise from northeast to southwest is crossed by a number of long, gentle east-west ridges and occasionally steep, rugged escarpments. On the northern and eastern shorelines, rocky bluffs rise to an elevation of 30 m (98 ft) or more above Lake Ontario, while the western shore has many inlets with sandy shores and large sandbars that define bodies of water such as West Lake and East Lake.

Soil

Topsoils range from reddish-brown clay loam to sandy loam and overlay limestone bedrock embedded with shale fragments. The stony surface and numerous rock and shale fragments within the soils allow water to drain into the limestone, which ensures good drainage of winter-melt and substantial root penetration for mature vines. This rocky soil also allows good heat conduction and retention and encourages early warming in the spring. ↩



Emerging Wine Regions



Just 40 years ago Niagara Peninsula and Lake Erie North Shore were considered barely capable of growing fine *vinifera* wine, and Prince Edward County less than 15 years ago. But these “established” appellations may be just the beginning. In the last 10 years vines have been planted elsewhere in the province, driven by consumers embracing local products and adventurous growers and winemakers who have more experience and better tools at their disposal. Equipment to more efficiently “hill up” or bury vines to protect against winter freeze, and the installation of wind machines to guard against frosts, are game changers.

The area most likely to be Ontario’s next VQA appellation sits between the existing Lake Erie North Shore and Niagara Peninsula appellations. Locally dubbed the South Coast, it is quite a warm pocket on the north shore of Lake Erie, centered on Norfolk County and the summer resort town of Port Dover. Further north, the Georgian Bay area boasts its own unique grape-growing microclimate and topography thanks to the limestone escarpment which traps moderating lake effects blowing in from Georgian Bay. Vineyards are also found in the area north of Toronto on the Oak Ridges Moraine which is Ontario’s most significant landform stretching 160kms from the Niagara Escarpment to the Trent River. 🍷



ONTARIO SPARKLING WINES

- Over 30 wineries produce sparkling wines
- Annual production of approximately 55,000 cases
- Over 65% of production is Traditional Method
- 33% of Traditional Method sparklers are Rosé
- Primary varietals used for Traditional Method are Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Riesling is a key variety used for Charmat Method
- VQA requires a minimum of 12 months of lees time for vintage dated Traditional Method sparklers and 9 months of lees time for non-vintage

Sparkling

Bubbly is rapidly rising to the top as a key strength of Ontario winemaking. The cool climate and limestone-based soils, plus Ontario's proficiency with the Champagne grapes – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and even a couple of Pinot Meunier vineyards – add up to exactly the right recipe for fine aged bubbly made in the Traditional Method. And for those who want less expensive fresh and fruity wines made from the Charmat or tank method, Ontario also easily provides high acid aromatic grapes like Riesling and Vidal, even Sauvignon Blanc.

Ontario has drawn serious sparkling winemakers as far back as 1974 when the Podamer Champagne Company first made Chardonnay-based Traditional Method wines. But the market for serious sparkling did not develop until the late 1990s and early 2000s when Niagara wineries like 13th Street, Henry of Pelham, Trius and Cave Spring Cellars equipped themselves to make sparkling that was fermented and aged in bottle. By the 2004 vintage Huff Estate in Prince Edward County, led by French-trained winemaker Frédéric Picard, had realized the potential of the area's even cooler climate and limestone soils – followed quickly by Hinterland, which makes sparkling only in Prince Edward County. As the thirst for good sparkling expands, so does its production, with almost 30 wineries in Ontario now making bubbly.

"Canadian sparkling wine was a revelation." – Oz Clarke

"Ontario bubbles have little to envy. After a big tasting of VQA sparkling wines, I'm convinced more than ever that Ontario has the potential to produce, and is already producing, quality wines of the caliber that should make the champenois quiver in their standard-issue vigneron coveralls." – John Szabo

Icewine

Ontario as a World Leader

Grape Varieties

In Ontario, Icewine must be made from *vitis vinifera* grape varieties or the hybrid variety Vidal Blanc. The most popular varieties are Vidal Blanc, Riesling and Cabernet Franc. Some small lots include Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wine Character and Style

- ☞ Depending on varietal, expect rich aromas and flavours of ripe tropical fruits, peach, honey, citrus, melon and strawberry
- ☞ Sweet with firm backbone of acidity making them perfectly balanced
- ☞ Also used as a “dosage” for sparkling wine or cocktails
- ☞ Enjoyed as a dessert on their own or with desserts
- ☞ Perfect complement for rich, strongly flavoured foods such as foie gras and aged blue cheeses
- ☞ Matches surprisingly well with spicy foods

Regulation

Icewine production is regulated in Ontario under the VQA Act and regulations. Strict standards are monitored by VQA inspectors, from vineyard to the bottle. Rules cover grape varieties, harvest procedures, winemaking, and testing before the wine is released. No wine may use the term “Icewine” on its label unless it is certified by VQA Ontario.

An Ontario treasure, Icewine is a luscious, intensely flavoured wine made from grapes that have been left to freeze naturally on the vine.

With almost ideal climate conditions for the reliable annual production of Icewine – warm summers to ripen the grapes and cold but not too cold winters – Ontario has produced Icewine commercially since 1984, and has been considered a leading Icewine producer on the global stage since 1991, when Inniskillin won the illustrious Grand Prix d’Honneur at Bordeaux’s Vinexpo wine fair.

Today, Ontario is recognized as producing some of the world’s finest Icewine. ☞



How Icewine is Made

Icewine season starts when the grape vines are netted in the autumn to protect them from being devoured by birds. Grapes are then left on the vine until a sustained temperature of -8°C or lower is reached (typically between December and February). During the time between the end of the growing season and harvest, the grapes dehydrate and the juices are concentrated, creating the characteristic complexities of Icewine.

Grape growers and wineries carefully watch the weather, looking for an optimum stretch of temperatures between -10°C and -12°C . This range will produce very sweet juice in the range of 35 to 39 degrees Brix (a measurement of sugar). Typically, a period of at least six hours is needed to harvest and press the grapes – usually during the night. Many wineries harvest by hand but mechanized harvesting is also used.

Harvested grapes are pressed in small hydraulic presses. Because the grapes are frozen, most of the mass is water and is left behind as ice in the press. Only a small amount of concentrated juice is extracted. Juice yields for Icewine grapes are much lower than for table wines – only 15% of the expected yield for grapes harvested for table wines. Icewine juice is very sweet and can be difficult to ferment. High sugars can create a hostile environment for the yeast and fermentation stops early, leaving relatively low alcohol and high sugar levels in the finished wine. 🍷

“Ontario is a world’s leading producer of Icewine and the most consistent. After all, we’re blessed with a climate that allows our winemakers to produce this gift of winter every year. Whether they make it from Vidal, Riesling, Cabernet Franc or other varieties, Ontario Icewine offers one of the most distinctive flavour profiles that can grace the cellars of collectors and neophytes alike.” – Tony Aspler



History of Ontario Wine

The planting of grape vines and the making of wine in Ontario dates back to 1811, when a German-born man named Johann Schiller transplanted Pennsylvania-native labrusca and hybrids on 20 acres on the banks of the Credit River in Cooksville, approximately 20 km west of Toronto.

The modern era of winemaking in Ontario began in 1974 when Inniskillin was granted the first new winery licence since 1916 Prohibition. Within a few short years, more wineries opened and were integral in establishing a new-born industry through their pioneering efforts.

Committed to quality, Ontario wineries created the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) program to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards. Ontario boasts a vibrant grape and wine industry that enjoys continued growth. 🍷



1811

Johann Schiller transplants labrusca and hybrid grape vines on 20 acres in Cooksville, Ontario.



1866

Kentucky grape growers plant Catawba and Delaware vines on Pelee Island. Ontario's first winery is established - Vin Villa Winery.



1873

George Barnes opens Niagara's first winery, called The Ontario Grape Growing and Wine Manufacturing Company, later renamed Barnes Winery.



1890

There are 35 wineries in Ontario, mostly based in Essex County.



1927

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) is created to regulate distribution and sale of all wine, beer and spirits, and to regulate Ontario wine.



2005

After three years of study VQA designates two regional appellations and 10 sub-appellations within the Niagara Peninsula. Currently 75 wineries in Ontario.



2007

Prince Edward County becomes a VQA appellation.



2010

New wineries open in “emerging regions” in Norfolk County and Grey County.



2011

The annual International Cool Climate Chardonnay Celebration is launched in Niagara, the first event assembling international winemakers for an event in Ontario wine country.



Future

Ontario has 140 VQA wineries and enjoys continued growth.



2001

The first winery opens in Prince Edward County - Waupoos Estates Winery.



2000

Niagara College establishes a Winery and Viticulture Technician program and the Niagara College Teaching Winery.



1996

The Cool Climate Oenology & Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) is established at Brock University.



1991

Inniskillin 1989 Icewine wins Grand Prix d’Honneur at Vinexpo, Bordeaux, France.



1988

Ontario wineries create the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards that became law in 1999.



1952

Brights Wines removes 600 acres of native vines to plant new *vitis vinifera* and hybrid varieties, and produces Canada’s first *vinifera* wine in 1955.



1974

The Wine Council of Ontario is incorporated. In 1975, Donald Ziraldo and Karl Kaiser of Inniskillin receive the first new winery licence in almost 50 years (Inniskillin Wines).



1978

Early *vinifera* vineyards are established by Paul Bosc Sr. at Chateau des Charmes and the Pennachetti family on Cave Spring Vineyard.



1979

German vintner Herman Weis buys 50 acres and plants Riesling in the St. Urban Vineyard. Currently part of Vineland Estates Winery.



1983

First experimental Icewines are produced at some wineries. The first commercial Icewine is produced in 1984.

Ontario Wines of Origin Quick Facts

Wine Country Ontario sees over 1.8 million visitors annually for wine tourism

Ontario has over 170 licenced wineries including grape and fruit wineries

Number of wineries that produce VQA wines of origin: 152

Total Ontario wine grape area: 17,000 acres (6,900 hectares)

Number of grape vines in Ontario: 17 million

Average annual volume of Icewine produced: 850,000 litres

Average annual grape tonnage used in
VQA wines of origin in a typical year: 35,000 to 40,000 tonnes

Total retail value of VQA wines: Over \$400 million CAD

(Stats - for year ended March 31, 2014 - all numbers are rounded, for the 2013 harvest year)

More detailed statistics are available in VQA Ontario's
Annual Report - www.vqaontario.ca

Grape production is sourced from the Grape Growers of Ontario
Annual Report - www.grapegrowersofontario.com

Technical information sourced from Dr. Tony Shaw

"Ontario's wine production zones are pristine and postcard-pretty, with many excellent country restaurants and gifted cooks only adding to the pleasure of hunting down world-class caliber wines." - Ian D'Agata

For more information contact:

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