

# RIESLING

## Snapshot of a core variety:

**Region:** Ontario (three VQA wine appellations - Niagara Peninsula, Prince Edward County, and Lake Erie North Shore; the Niagara Peninsula is also divided into 10 sub-appellations.)

**Country:** Canada

**Geographical coordinates:** Between 41 degrees and 44 degrees north and between 77 and 82 degrees west. All three appellations are within three hours of Toronto, Ontario; the Niagara Peninsula (the largest appellation) is approximately 80 km south of Toronto.

**Length of growing season (days between last spring frost and first fall frost):** Number of Frost Free Days (FFD) varies between 194 and 208 depending on the appellation. Average Growing Degree Days (GDD) in a growing season is 1400.

**Major soil types:** limestone-based shale, clay loam

**Total vineyard area (all types of grapes):** 15,000 acres (approx. 6,070 hectares)

**Total Riesling acreage:** 1,650 acres (approx. 667 hectare)

**Number of wine producers in region (all types of wine):** 132

**Number of wine producers who produce at least some Riesling:** 96 wineries in Ontario produce Riesling. Riesling is used in 17% of Ontario's annual total production.

**Average annual size of Riesling crop:** 6,500 metric tonnes; annual production is 3.6 million litres (400,000 cases), and 240,000 of these cases are single-varietal Rieslings.

**Most common styles of wine:** Dry, Medium or Off-dry, Late Harvest, Icewine.

**Average price and range of prices of Riesling wines:** Rieslings produced as table wine (excluding Icewine) range in price from CAD\$11.00 to CAD\$35.00 (750ml); Riesling Icewines are priced up to CAD\$80.00 (375ml).

**Major markets (countries and/or states/provinces):** Primary market is Ontario; U.S., Asia and U.K. for export (mostly Icewine).

## Wine Country Ontario - Our Riesling Story

Ontario, a cool-climate wine growing region, enjoys a special status as one of the few regions in the New World where Riesling is a signature variety. Other varieties like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc are now just as popular, and grow well at 43 to 45 degrees latitude similar to the centre of Europe, but Riesling remains a key

varietal, with some vineyards now older than 30 years and the quality of grapes improving every vintage.

In the early 1970s when Ontario's wine renaissance began in Niagara, Riesling topped the list of Vinifera plantings. This was Canada after all - a northern place - so it seemed a natural for location for Riesling, Europe's great hardy northern grape. In 1976, with the assistance of a federal agricultural grant, the first Riesling was planted at Vineland Estates on bench land of the Niagara Escarpment (the same limestone ridge over which the mighty Niagara Falls tumble). The vines came from Herman Weis, a nurseryman in Germany's Mosel Valley. By the early 1980s Riesling's reputation had started to spread, attracting the interest of German émigrés Herbert Konzelmann and Ewald Reif, as well as Austrian Karl Kaiser, who had co-founded Inniskillin - Ontario's first new winery since Prohibition - in 1974. This group planted on flat lands near the shores of Lake Ontario.

But it was a family of Italian origin that moved Riesling into the mainstream of Ontario's wine culture, where it has remained to this day. Len and Tom Pennachetti founded Cave Spring winery, based on a spectacular Riesling vineyard inland on the Niagara Escarpment bench land near Beamsville. They made estate-grown Rieslings - Dry and Off-dry, a Late Harvest called Indian Summer, as well as one of the first Riesling Icewines. Today these remain staples on wine lists throughout Ontario, indeed all of Canada.

Dozens of other producers have since joined on, including some in warmer Lake Erie North Shore and colder Prince Edward County. But it was new Niagara "bench" wineries like Thirty Bench, Flat Rock, Tawse, Hidden Bench and Featherstone that opened in the 2000s that elevated Riesling by aiming high in terms of quality and price. They in turn have given rise to small Riesling specialists like Charles Baker and Twenty Twenty-Seven Cellars making tiny quantities from single vineyards.

Most of Ontario's Riesling is still based on the Weis clone (21B) imported from Germany's Mosel Valley. When grown on the bench sites it produces racy examples with citrus, green apple and mineral notes. Two other clones play a minor role - an Alsatian, Clone 49 and Clone 239 from Geisenheim, Germany. As demonstrated in a Riesling clone project by Cattail Creek of Niagara-on-the-Lake these produce somewhat soft, richer styles. A non-bench Riesling vineyard planted in 1978 to the Alsace clone by Paul Bosc of Chateau des Charmes continues to turn out gold medal Dry, Late Harvest and Riesling Icewines.

Niagara can, and occasionally does, make botrytis-affected Rieslings (notably Henry of Pelham in rare vintages) but so much Riesling is turned into Icewine that there is little demand for botrytized examples. Some consider Riesling as the most prized of the Icewine varieties, although it produces less than the hybrid Vidal. Riesling's naturally high acidity is the perfect foil for sugar levels that can hit 35 Brix. (It takes 3.5 kilos of frozen Riesling grapes to make one 375ml bottle of Icewine!)

With a quarter century of Riesling experience Ontario is clearly emerging as a New World leader with this classic grape - not so much as a mass market, easy sipping, Off-dry wine, but as a terroir-driven, collectible and fine dining wine that ages well and

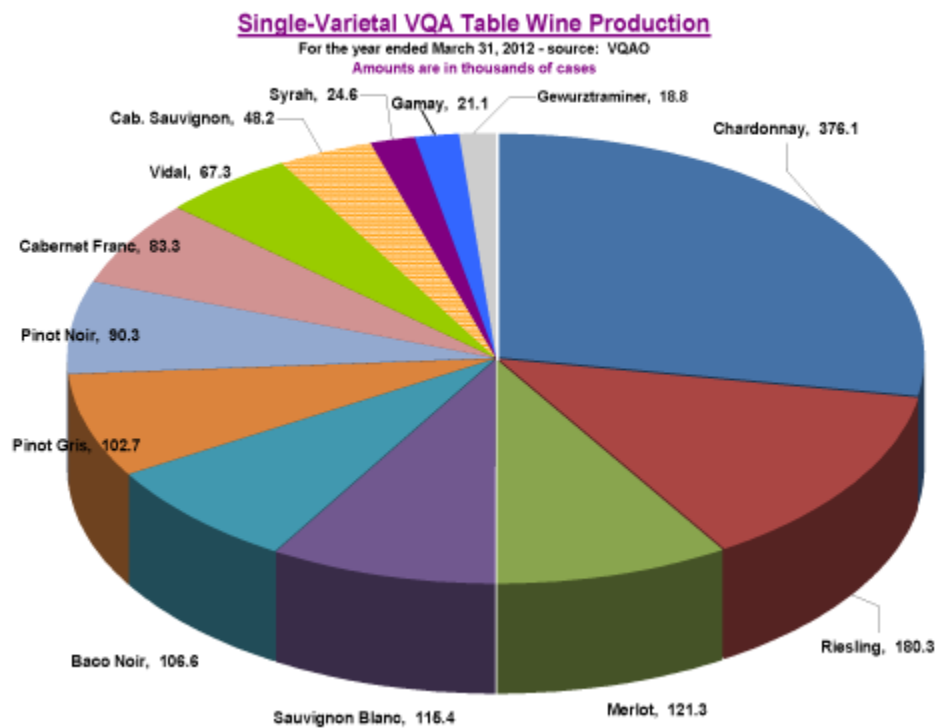
reflects individual vintages and sites. Those who follow German Riesling for all those reasons have a new world to discover in Ontario as well.

### **Pie-chart representation of volumes of VQA wines, by grape variety**

These two charts show:

1. The volume of single-varietal table wine produced from the major grape varieties grown in Ontario; and
2. The volumes (by percentage) wine produced by each variety that went into the production of ALL VQA wine.

Data is for the year ended March 31, 2012 (source: VQA Ontario)



**Percentage of Volume of VQA Wine Produced (from Grape Varieties)**

For the year ended March 31, 2012 - source: VQAO

