



Deutsches Weininstitut GmbH
Press Office
Platz des Weines 2 • 55294 Bodenheim
Ernst Büscher, Press Officer
Phone +49 (0) 6135 9323-156
ernst.buescher@deutscheweine.de
www.germanwines.de

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Press Release

Lean wines, full of aroma: The 2021 vintage in the German winegrowing regions

The best month for winegrowers in the 2021 wine year was not May, but September. With plenty of sunshine and cool nights in many regions, September brought a conciliatory end to a season that was clearly different from the three previous years and reminded many of the time before climate change. While heat and drought had characterised the vintages from 2018 to 2020 and ensured an early harvest, this year coolness slowed down growth, and frequent rain made it extremely challenging for many vintners to keep downy mildew under control. September then made up for a lot: it promoted ripening and ensured that the must weights were appealing. This meant that grapes could be harvested whose quality satisfied the producers and promise good wines - with less alcohol than in previous years, but no less aroma.

According to the latest estimate, the harvest volume nationwide was 8,733,000 hectolitres, three percent above the previous year's figure and only slightly below the ten-year average. However, there were major differences in the individual wine regions.

The German Wine Institute (DWI) has asked representatives from the 13 German winegrowing regions how the 2021 vintage has developed in their area.

Ahr, 563 hectares

After the devastating flood of the Ahr on the night of July 15, one thing was certain for the wine producers: they absolutely had to secure the new vintage, which ripened relatively unscathed on steep slopes and terraces in "Germany's red wine paradise", because: "The liquidity of the businesses was in the vineyards and no longer in the wineries", says Dr Knut Schubert, managing director of the Ahr Winegrowers' Association. The harvest, with which many volunteers helped, varied widely: Those who had done the immense foliage work properly before the flood still achieved "a relatively good result" just below last year's level, Schubert says of the vintners who grow their own grapes. Others had losses of up to 50 percent. Adding to the woes, fungal diseases were prevalent in the Ahr region as elsewhere throughout Germany. However, good weather in September had a positive effect on the quality of the vintage, which is estimated at 35,000 hectolitres (2020: 39,000). This reduced total also reflects the 60 hectares that could not be harvested due to the flood. According to Schubert, Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder), which accounts for 85 percent of the yield, benefited from the weather. The

winemakers, who had worked hard to prepare their cellars, were pleased with the quality. "The winegrowers here expect a fruity, powerful wine. It will also have a pleasant acidity and less alcohol, which was always a problem in the three previous years," he said. They are anticipating "a really special vintage, also in terms of meeting their expectations for high quality".

Baden, 15,812 hectares

Baden is considered Germany's warmest growing region, but despite its heterogeneity, around Easter there was little sign of it in the southern parts of Markgräflerland, Kaiserstuhl, Tuniberg, Breisgau and Ortenau: late frosts and icy winds caused damage of up to 80 per cent to the young wet buds in some vineyards. Afterwards, frequent rain, accompanied by local hail in Markgräflerland, spurred fungal growth in many places. After a lot of work, however, the vintners were able to enjoy a beautiful late summer with cool nights, which benefited the development of the white wine aromas. The total amount of must was an estimated 977,000 hectolitres, eleven per cent below the previous year's figure and 20 per cent below the ten-year average. "It really was a very stressful year for the winegrowers, but with good results if you look at the qualities, especially where grape selection was carefully carried out," says the vice managing director of the Baden Winegrowers' Association, Holger Klein. Like others, he feels reminded of a vintage before climate change. The white wines have certainly benefited. "We can expect fresh, fruity and rather light white wines", which are more moderate in alcohol and "tend to have a slightly fresher acidity than last year". The quantity of red wines produced is even lower, which is partly due to the rigorous selection of grapes when harvesting. The market can be served, but supplemented with "more from the very good previous years," says Klein.

Franken, 6163 hectares

Wine expert Hermann Mengler describes the season in Franconia as follows: "A vintage that required an enormous amount of effort during the vegetation period, with a forgiving autumn and an ideal September." After a cool and wet May, the vines took off in June and really "caught up", also in terms of leaf growth. Frequent rain fostered downy mildew and thus created a lot of work. A beautiful and dry September, however, placated the winegrowers, 80 percent of whom grow white wine. All grape varieties ripened well and, unlike the hot previous years, there was a nice, long harvest, says Beate Leopold from the Franconian Winegrowers' Association. It is estimated that 480,000 hectolitres of wine must were harvested - 79 percent more than in the frost-beaten year prior and twelve percent more than the ten-year average. The average must weight was 84 degrees Oechsle - which is quite satisfactory for such a year, says Leopold. And because the harvest was in the cooler period, the aromas are very pronounced and the acidity is also a bit stronger. It was a year for base wines to make sparkling, rosé wines and white wines - with less alcohol but more flavour, says Mengler, head of the Specialist Advisory Service for Cellar Management and Cellar Technology in the district of Lower Franconia. According to his information, many wineries are also speculating on ice wine.

Hessische Bergstraße, 463 hectares

"All's well that ends well" could be the motto of this wine year on the Hessische Bergstraße. In Germany's smallest winegrowing region around Bensheim, cool and changeable weather in spring slowed down budburst, and at the beginning of flowering in mid-June the plants were 16 to 20 days behind the previous year. Abundant rainfall until August allowed downy mildew to flourish and "concerns about the health of the grapes" grew, according to Otto Guthier, chairman of the Hessische Bergstrasse Winegrowers' Association. The dry September brought a turnaround for Riesling, Pinot Gris (Grauburgunder) and other varieties: ripeness progressed and at the main harvest in October the vintners were graced with "very appealing must weights", the average was 83 degrees Oechsle. The estimated must harvest of 32,000 hectolitres was eight percent below last year's bountiful figure, but still five percent above the ten-year average. Overall, "quality and quantity are very pleasing", says Guthier. "The first white wines are tasting aromatic and fruit-forward with a lively interplay of fruit and acid." In addition, there is a moderate alcohol content. In view of the capricious weather, the winemakers could be "absolutely satisfied" with the 2021 vintage.

Mittelrhein, 465 hectares

In the Middle Rhine region with its steep slopes, many winegrowers are pleased with the significant increase in yields this year. Although a cool spring slowed down vine growth and fungal diseases flourished, an estimated 36,000 hectolitres ended up in the cellars in this Riesling-dominated region - 35 percent more than in 2020 and 30 percent more than the ten-year average - although the yields varied greatly between wineries. In terms of overall percentage growth amongst the 13 German regions, the Mittelrhein is in second place behind Franken. In addition to the intensive work of the winegrowers, a sunny September, which brought up to 45 percent more sunshine hours than the average, contributed to the abundant harvest. "If we are honest, September and October also saved the harvest in terms of weather conditions," says Gerd Knebel, managing director of the Mittelrhein Winegrowers' Association. The Riesling, which coped well with the cool ripening conditions, attained must weights between 80 and 90 degrees Oechsle. There were signs of elegant, aromatic white wines with a distinctive acid structure, "very good" and "lively, fresh, fruity wines" with rather moderate alcohol values, "just as the market demands," said Knebel. Most winemakers are very satisfied with both yield and quality.

Mosel, 8689 hectares

The prime south-facing vineyards on the Mosel were able to build on old successes this year. While it was often too hot and too dry for them in previous years, they were "particularly favoured" in the significantly cooler and wetter wine year of 2021, according to the Moselwein Association. This was reflected in the must weights. Riesling, the dominant grape variety, reached 95 degrees Oechsle in good sites, while the majority of the harvest was between 70 and 90 degrees. In the region, which is characterised by steep slopes and has a white wine share of 90 percent, most wine producers rate the aroma of the grapes very positively and expect predominantly fruity and refreshing wines. "Overall, a fine, clear vintage typical of the Mosel is expected with a lot of minerality," states Henning Seibert, chairman of Moselwein.

The alcohol levels are also somewhat lower here. The success of the harvest varies greatly. While some brought in a very good harvest, others faced total loss due to fungal diseases. There were also differences in the varieties: less Riesling, Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) and Dornfelder were harvested, while Elbling, Auxerrois and Pinot Blanc (Weißburgunder) yielded good quantities. Thanks to 'noble rot' (*Botrytis cinerea* fungus), there is also a chance for some late-harvest noble sweet (Beerenauslese) wines. The total yield is estimated at 781,000 hectolitres - six percent less than last year, but five percent above the ten-year average.

Nahe, 4230 hectares

Even though it rained often in many places this wine year, it wasn't enough in some places on the Nahe, at least in October. Harald Sperling, managing director of the Nahe Winegrowers' Association, reports that several winegrowers brought water to their vineyards that month because of the renewed drought. After the dry years of 2018 to 2020, the water supply has thinned out. For a long time, things had looked different this year. Coolness and rain made the vintage a "late bloomer", according to Sperling, and the vintners also had to contend with disease pressure. According to the association, there were "wineries with total loss due to mildew and those with almost no infestation, as well as all levels in between". A warm and dry September allowed the grapes to ripen, slowed down the fungal spread and was propitious for the harvest. The harvest volume was finally estimated around 288,000 hectolitres, ten per cent less than the previous year and the ten-year average. And what can one expect? "When it comes to white wine, good, fruity wines with a distinctive yet well-buffered acidity stand out," says Sperling. In addition, he says, the must weights are good and the wines are not too alcoholic. "These are wines to be enjoyed," he concludes.

Pfalz, 23,721 hectares

In the Palatinate, Germany's second-largest winegrowing region, the harvest this year was also very varied. "With regard to the amount of yield, the term "envious autumn" was seldom as applicable as it was in 2021," says viticulture expert Jürgen Oberhofer from the Dienstleistungszentrum Ländlicher Raum (DLR) Rheinpfalz. Good to very good yields were offset by isolated instances of total loss due to downy mildew. In June, the work in the vineyards increased due to heat and rain. "Those who did not succeed in taking systematic action had to put up with sometimes severe yield losses," says Reinhold Hörner, president of the Pfalz Winegrowers' Association. From August onwards, the weather normalised and there was a "very positive harvest". The estimated must volume is 2 230 000 hectolitres, three percent less than in 2020 and one percent more than the ten-year average. One can look forward to "great wines", says the first chairman of Pfalzweins Association, Boris Kranz. For him, "often low alcohol levels, a well-integrated acid structure and distinctive primary fruit aromas" are characteristic of the vintage, which can be expected to produce fresh, lively, light wines. According to Oberhofer, the "winning grape variety of the vintage" is Riesling. The main grape variety of the Pfalz benefited the most in Germany's largest Riesling-growing region - "mainly because of climatic conditions like we used to have before climate change".

Rheingau, 3200 hectares

Difficult, but ultimately less difficult than feared - that's how the wine year went in the Rheingau, according to Andrea Engelmann, the managing director of the Rheingau Winegrowers' Association. The reason here was also downy mildew, which kept causing "disease pressure" until September. "It has never been so extreme in recent years," says Engelmann. There were total losses especially with Merlot, which, however, only grows on about 0.5 percent of the vineyards between Hochheim am Main and Lorch. The wine producers also had the problem that for a long time the acidity of the berries was high, and at the same time a lot of foliage, which is involved in acid degradation and grape ripening, was lost due to the fungus. Finally, the sunny September brought about a turning point in the Rheingau. That is why there are now good quality wines in the cellar and "all in all" they are satisfied with the vintage. Riesling, which accounts for 80 percent of the region's production, benefited from the fact that the harvest was three to four weeks later than in previous years. Engelmann described the wines as having "a fine bouquet". An estimated 220,000 hectolitres of must were harvested - four per cent less than last year and three per cent more than the average of the past ten years. A few vintners also harvested noble sweet specialities, and some have left grapes hanging for ice wine, Engelmann reports.

Rheinhessen, 26,943 hectares

In retrospect, the winegrowers consider it a stroke of luck that the vines in Rheinhessen sprouted later than usual this year, because the shoots in Germany's largest winegrowing region were spared the night frosts in April. "In the three previous years, these temperatures would have led to considerable losses because the vines had already sprouted in April," says Andreas Köhr from the South Rhineland-Pfalz Farmers' and Winegrowers' Association. In other respects, too, the wine-growing year stood out from the three hot and dry previous years, for example because of the disease pressure caused by the wetness, which caused "significant damage" in some sites and vineyards despite control measures. Overall, Rheinhessen came off well, said Köhr. The late start of the harvest in mid-September compared to previous years was also a fortunate coincidence, because beautiful September days contributed decisively to the fact that they were able to harvest "a very appealing vintage". Ripening in the cool nights produces fruity wines that offer a wide spectrum of aromas even with moderate alcohol content, says Köhr. In addition, there is a fresh acidity, "one of the characteristics of German white wines, and that comes out much better this year than in the three years before". About 2,590,000 hectolitres of must were harvested, one per cent more than in 2020 and four per cent more than the ten-year average.

Saale-Unstrut, 819 hectares

While many winegrowing regions in Germany were able to take their time with the harvest this year, the Saale and Unstrut regions had to hurry. After abundant rainfall in August, some grapes had burst open. In order to harvest healthy grapes, the harvest was brought forward by seven to ten days, reports Hans Albrecht Zieger, president of the Saale-Unstrut Winegrowing Association in Germany's northernmost wine region. "We would have liked to wait another week, but then we would have run the risk of the quantity plunging even more." It suffered

anyway because in February frost down to minus 27 degrees caused considerable damage to vines, especially around Freyburg. Where the frost did not hit, there were relatively good yields, also because the rain in August increased the grape weight. According to estimates, 38,000 hectolitres of wine must was produced, 27 percent more than in the previous frost-stricken year, but 15 percent less than the ten-year average. In terms of quality, the vintage is predominantly in the Qualitäts wine range, the later varieties, such as Pinot (Burgunder) and Riesling, are also at the Prädikat wine level. "The vintage also allowed for premium wines," says Zieger. The wines' fruit is expressed beautifully and they are very variety-typical, reflecting the key aromas very well. "They are fine, filigree, lean wines with a beautiful freshness, which is supported by an animating acidity," he says with a view to white wine and rosé.

Sachsen, 496 hectares

"I still think we got off relatively lightly," says Felix Hößelbarth, deputy chairman of the Sachsen Winegrowers' Association, summing up the vintage. In Germany's easternmost wine-growing region, downy and powdery mildew were also rampant due to the wet weather, and later there were also problems with grape rot. At times, they were even afraid of losing the entire harvest to fungal disease, says Hößelbarth. The fungus-resistant grape varieties - such as Cabernet Blanc, Sauvignier Gris, Johanniter and Solaris - were the only ones that produced normal to good results. They contributed to the fact that the harvest in the Elbe Valley, produced an estimated 22,000 hectolitres of wine must, which turned out to be five percent better than in the frost-plagued previous year. The ten-year average was missed by only two percent. The cellars are relatively full despite the adverse weather conditions, says Hößelbarth, who assesses the year "on balance as good". Wine lovers can look forward to good quality wines. "We have beautiful aromas again, the wines are fresher that are maturing in the cellars, not quite as opulent, but more elegant" - unlike in the three hot and dry previous years.

Württemberg, 11,424 hectares

In Württemberg, the overall damp and cool weather throughout the year allowed for a later harvest, which was particularly beneficial for the amount of white wine harvested, says the managing director of the Württemberg Winegrowers' Association, Dr Hermann Morast. The white must yield increased by 44 percent in comparison to the previous year, twice as much as the amount of red grape must harvested. The total harvest volume increased by an estimated 34 percent to 1,000,000 hectolitres compared to the previous year, which was marked by drought. Among the white wines, the winegrowers were particularly pleased with the quality of the main variety, Riesling. Consumers could look forward to typical Rieslings, which, unlike in previous years, have moderate alcohol levels and a fresh fruit acidity, according to Morast. Overall, very fruity, easy-drinking white wines with exciting aroma profiles are expected. However, 2021 was also a year of red wine, which grows on around two thirds of the area under cultivation there. The leading grape varieties Trollinger and Lemberger also have less alcohol and are therefore somewhat leaner, but still complex. According to Morast's assessment, one can expect "rather more filigree, fruity red wines with a subtle acid structure". Because of the dry days and cool nights during the harvest, the red wines also have a complex aroma profile.