

# Types of white wines

Chardonnay, gewürztraminer, moscato are white grape **varieties**. This page describes wine styles by variety and production area. Any below variety can give dry white wine or [sweet white wine](#). Some varieties can be made bubbly or still.

If only one **variety** (chardonnay, gewürztraminer) is mentioned on the label, then the wine is called **varietal** and is named after the grape with a *capital* initial (Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer). Varietal wines primarily show the fruit: how the wines tastes much depends on the grape variety.

## Chardonnay

(Shar-do-nay) Chardonnay was the most popular white grape through the **1990's**. It can be made sparkling or still.

**Food pairings:** a good choice for fish (even salmon) and chicken dishes.

**Districts:** chardonnay makes the principle white wine of Burgundy (Bourgogne, France), where it originated. Chardonnay is versatile and is grown with success in most viticultural areas under a variety of climatic conditions.

**Typical taste** of the different types of chardonnay: voluptuous. [Chardonnay wines](#) are often wider-bodied (and more velvety) than other types of dry whites, with rich citrus (lemon, grapefruit) flavors. Fermenting in new oak barrels adds a buttery tone (vanilla, toast, coconut, toffee). Tasting a USD 20 Californian Chardonnay should give citrus fruit flavors, hints of melon, vanilla, some toasty character and some creaminess. [Burgundy whites can taste very different](#).

## Sauvignon blanc

(So-veen-yawn Blah)

**Food pairings:** a **versatile food wine** for seafood, poultry, and salads.

**Districts:** of French origin, sauvignon blanc is grown in the Bordeaux region where it is blended with semillon. The Loire valley and New Zealand produce some excellent sauvignon blanc varietals. Some Australian Sauvignon Blancs, grown in warmer areas, tends to be flat and lack fruit qualities.

**Typical taste** in varietal wine: sauvignon blanc normally shows a herbal character suggesting bell pepper or freshly mown grass. The dominating flavors range from sour green fruits of apples, pears and gooseberries through to tropical fruits of melon, mango and blackcurrant. Quality unoaked Sauvignon Blancs will display smokey qualities; they require bright aromas and a strong acid finish and are best grown in cool climates.

## Semillon

(Say-mee-yaw)

**Food pairings:** Semillon goes with fish but there are many better matches. Serve dry Semillon with clams, mussels, or pasta salad.

**Districts:** sémillon is the major white grape in the Bordeaux region of France. Sémillon is also known as Hunter (River Riesling), boal/bual of Madeira, chevrier, columbier, malaga and blanc doux. Sémillon is also grown in Chile, Argentina, Australia, and California.

**Typical taste:** the wine varietal features distinct **fig-like** character. Sémillon is often blended with sauvignon blanc to delimit its strong berry-like flavors.

From the Bordeaux region of France come the great Sauternes and Barsac. These wines are produced from overripe sémillon grapes. They are blended with sauvignon blanc to produce a syrupy, full-bodied wine that may be world class.

### Moscato

(Mos-cato) The moscato variety belongs to the muscat family of grapes - and so do moscatel and muscat ottonel.

**Food pairings:** Moscato shows best on its own: without food but sweet wines will pair with dessert.

**Districts:** moscato grows in most vine-friendly climates, including Italy, the Rhône Valley (where it is called muscat blanc à petits grains) and Austria (where it is called Muskateller).

**Typical taste:** often sweet and always **fruity**, with a characteristic grapefruity and musky aroma. Moscato wines are easily recognizable to anyone who has tasted a Muscat table grape.

### Pinot grigio

(Pee-no gree-zo)

**Food pairings:** versatile.

**Districts:** pinot grigio is planted extensively in the Venezia and Alto Adige regions of Italy. Pinot grigio is also grown in the western coastal regions of the U.S.A. It is called malvoisie in the Loire Valley and pinot gris in the rest of France. In Germany and Austria pinot grigio is known as the Ruländer or Grauer Burgunder. Similar aliases are used in the German settled regions of Australia.

**Typical taste:** **crisp**, dry wines with good acid "bite" are typically made in Italy and Germany. Oregon or Alsace Pinot Gris shows **aromatic**, fruity flavors. Pairing with food is more difficult because Alsatian winemakers leave the grapes on the vine much longer. The perfume in Alsatian Pinot Gris makes it especially well suited for Thai or spicy Chinese cuisine.

### Gewürztraminer

(Gah-vurtz-tra-meener)

A **very aromatic** variety.

**Food pairings:** gewürztraminer is ideal for sipping. It can fit Asian food, pork and grilled sausages.

**Districts:** gewürztraminer is best known in wines from Alsace, Germany, the U.S. West Coast, and New York.

**Typical taste** in varietal wine: **fruity** flavors with aromas of rose petals, peaches, lychees, and allspice. A Gewürztraminer seems generally not as refreshing as other types of dry whites.

### Riesling

(Rees-ling)

**Food pairings:** dry versions go well with fish, chicken and pork dishes. The crispness of a Riesling works very well with tuna and salmon while the acidity level intermingles with the slight smokiness of the eel and cuts through the layers of spicier Japanese foods.

**Districts:** the classic German grape of the Rhine and Mosel, riesling grows in all wine regions. Germany's great Rieslings are usually made slightly sweet, with steely acidity for balance. Riesling from Alsace and the Eastern U.S. is also excellent, though usually made in a different style, equally aromatic but typically drier (not sweet). California Rieslings are much less successful, usually sweet without sufficient acidity for balance.

**Typical taste** in varietal wine: Riesling wines are much lighter than Chardonnay wines. The aromas generally include fresh apples. The riesling variety expresses itself very differently depending on the district and the winemaking. Rieslings should taste fresh. If they do, then they might also prove tastier and tastier as they age.