

## Organic Wine

There is increasing interest in organic wine from around the world, both for their quality and the positive benefits to the environment. Organic wine is grown in a manner that protects the environment and preserves the life of both the soil and the vines. The resulting organic wines are truly the purest expression of the grape.

For organic wine produced in and imported to the United States, both the growing of the grapes and the production of the wine must be certified. **100% of the wines we import are grown and produced to meet the USDA organic standards, and carry certifications as such.** All agricultural ingredients used in the wine must be grown and produced without excluded methods including most conventional pesticides, synthetic fertilizers and ingredients, genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, or sewage sludge. Natural methods are used to combat pests and other natural vineyard hazards. These include the use of predatory insects such as ladybugs and lacewings, and a systematic approach that promotes healthy vines and minimizes the vineyards' susceptibility to insect and disease attack.



The organic wine is then produced and bottled in a certified organic facility. Organic techniques are applied including minimal processing and no use of chemical additives. According to the [Organic Vineyard Alliance](#), "When making conventional wine, literally hundreds of chemicals can be and are used, not just added sulfites. Some conventional winemakers add sugar, oak chips and flavor agents. Wine that is certified organic is allowed to have about 70 organic and naturally occurring acids, salts, and enzymes. However, unlike in conventionally produced wine, any chemical used in a certified-organic wine cannot have an adverse effect on the environment or on human health as defined by the Food and Drug Administration. Source: [The National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances](#), issued by the National Organic Program (NOP)."

Organic wine growers promote ecological biodiversity among the vineyards, allowing other plants to grow in and around the vineyard in order to attract beneficial insects and pollinators. Over time, organic vineyards develop a natural resistance to adverse weather and insects and tend to produce higher quality and more robust grapes even in the most adverse growing conditions.

## The Different Categories of Organic Wine

Organic wine sold in the United States fall into two categories: "Made with Organically Grown Grapes" and "Organic." The primary difference between the two is in the use of sulfites. **Both categories of wines are made with 100% USDA Certified Organically Grown Grapes.** Many are also produced with **No Sulfites Added**, and only those wines are allowed to display the USDA organic seal on the label. The level of sulfites in wine is measured in "ppm," or parts per million.

Other wines are organically grown and [Demeter certified Biodynamic](#).

The USDA has trade partnerships with more than 100 countries. These partnerships allow organic products certified in one country to be sold as organic in the other. Regardless of country of origin, **traded products must meet the labeling requirements in the destination country.** Reputable third-party certification agencies inspect the wineries to ensure they are growing and producing wines to USDA Organic standards. Therefore, **a wine produced and sold in a foreign country typically has a separate label if it is also imported to the United States.**

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## Wines Made With Organic Grapes

Wine sold, labeled, or represented as being “Made With Organic Grapes” must meet these [criteria](#):

- **100 percent of all grapes (of all varieties) must be certified organic**, and be:
  - Produced without excluded methods including most conventional pesticides, fertilizers, synthetic ingredients, ionizing radiation, or sewage sludge.
  - Produced per the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List).
  - Overseen by an organic certifying agent.
  - Any remaining agricultural ingredients (e.g., yeast) are not required to be organic, but must be produced without excluded methods as listed above.
- Any non-agricultural ingredients must be specifically allowed on the National List.
- The wine is produced and bottled in a certified-organic facility.
- Sulfur dioxide (sulfites) may be added to yield less than 100 parts per million in finished grape wine, but may not be added to wine “made with” other organic fruit (e.g., apples).
- Labels must state the name of the certifying agent (certified organic by \*\*\* or similar).
- Label may state, “made with organic grapes.”
- Labels may not include the [USDA](#) organic seal. Source: [USDA](#)
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Our winery partner producers of wine labeled as “Made With Organic Grapes” use the lowest level of sulfites possible to prevent spoilage and bacterial contamination. The legal maximum for the combination of natural and added sulfites in wines labeled as “Made With Organic Grapes” is 100 parts per million (ppm) vs. the limit of 350 ppm in conventional wines.



tanks, and capped with a screw cap or top quality cork to ensure that no oxygen can reach the wine until it is opened. The resulting wines are fresh and flavorful.

## USDA Organic Wine No Sulfites Added

Many of our organic wine production partners also produce [USDA Certified Organic No Sulfites Added](#) wines (often referred to as NSA wines), with no added preservatives. These wines are allowed naturally occurring sulfite levels under 10 ppm. **Other agricultural ingredients that go into the wine, including yeast, also have to be certified organic.** Only Organic wines are allowed to display the USDA organic seal, and may be labeled as Organic or Organic Wine on the front and back label. Organic wines that contain under 10 ppm of sulfites may be labeled as “No Detectable Sulfites.”

Wineries producing these wines have developed proprietary methods to ensure their wines’ stability with an extended shelf life of 1-2 years. They start by selecting only the highest-quality, healthy grapes, grown in optimal conditions. These are often hand-picked to help ensure premium grapes. The wine is produced in super-hygienic conditions, bottled after a short fermentation in steel

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## What are Sulfites?

Sulfites (Sulfur Dioxide or SO<sub>2</sub>) are widely used in a variety of products, from dried fruit to orange juice, to prevent browning and spoilage. Conventional wines can contain sulfites up to 350 ppm. Many of our winery producers have developed proprietary methods that allow their wines to be produced without the addition of sulfites, especially red wine varietals. Still white wines that need to travel great distances are especially difficult to produce without sulfites.

Low levels of added sulfites are allowed in wine labeled as “Made with Organic Grapes.” All organic wine sold in the United States that contains any sulfites over 10 ppm must be labeled as “contains sulfites.” **In wines labeled as “Organic Wine” no added sulfites are allowed and naturally occurring sulfite levels must be under 10 parts per million (ppm).** Sulfur dioxide, a compound formed from sulfur and oxygen, occurs naturally during fermentation in small quantities.

According to Simon Wolf of [Decanter](#): “Despite its usefulness in slowing oxidation and knocking out harmful bacteria, some believe SO<sub>2</sub> also mutes the delicate nuances that express vintage or vineyard character...” At Natural Merchants, we work to import wines that use the least amount of sulfites and other interventions in the winemaking process as possible. The resulting wines are the true essence of the winery’s terroir, creating a “taste of place” and a glass to remember.

## Video - What is Organic Wine?



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