



WINE GUIDE

Make a Wine Gift Basket

Buying a premade gourmet wine gift basket can be expensive, especially if you order one online and have to factor shipping into the total cost.

The good news is that you can make a DIY wine gift basket for the connoisseur in your life for a fraction of the cost.

Along with gift cards and personalized items, gift baskets are one of the the best options for surprising someone who seemingly has everything. Christmas, birthdays or just because — make a DIY wine gift basket your go-to present for your next special occasion.

MATERIALS

First things first: You need wine. You will find that there is a broad range of prices for wines. Depending on your budget, you may want to look around at a few local liquor stores or grocers to find the best deals. You likely already know what kind of wine your friend likes, so don't veer too far from these options. Not all wines are created equal.

Now for the basket. Head to your local hobby shop or garden center to see what kind of basket options they offer. You're looking for a tightly woven basket that is able to hold up to 10 pounds by the time you add all of your wine, gourmet foods, glasses and other items.

The meats and cheeses you choose to include in the gift basket should be

ones that pair well with the basket's main wine. Do a little research or ask your local wine seller for ideas. The more you can add to the basket the better. Look at local craft, party or home stores for decorative items such as streamers, tissue paper, kitchen towels or colored napkins for ideas that are both fun and functional.

ASSEMBLING THE GIFT BASKET

Here are three easy steps to creating your DIY wine gift basket:

- Assemble all your gift basket items and stuff the bottom of the basket with your material of choice. This may be shredded newspaper or tissue paper — anything to give the bottom of the basket some filling.
- Place and layer your items in the basket, starting with the wine. Position the wine prominently in the center or side of the basket and build around it. If the bottle is cold, avoid placing paper items such as gift cards next to it. This will help prevent condensation from ruining these kinds of items.
- Fill in the gaps with more filler and add cellophane wrap around the basket. You'll be the hit of any special occasion with this custom, thoughtful DIY wine gift basket.

Wine Cocktails

Wine cocktails are growing in popularity because of their versatility as a perfect summer party drink or a fun dessert.

These dandies are made primarily with wine or champagne mixed with fruits, sodas or juices to help cut the acidity and dryness of the wine.

The key to a great wine cocktail is finding the right balance between bitter and sweet. Too many sweet ingredients can ruin a cocktail by making it sour or overly acidic. Too much wine and you lose the flavor of the fruity ingredients.

Always remember to add fresh fruits as a garnish. This will help liven up the drink and provide antioxidants, minerals and vitamins your body needs.

Sutter Home Family Vineyards in California offers these tasty recipes for the perfect wine cocktail. Simply combine the ingredients in a shaker with ice and garnish with the recommended fruit. Enjoy!

POM-MERLOT FUSION

- 4 ounces of merlot
- 2 ounces of sparkling pomegranate-blueberry juice
- Sugar Rim
- Garnish with lime

WITH A CHERRY ON TOP

- 3 ounces white merlot
- 1 ounce grenadine
- 1 ounce cherry vodka
- 1 ounce whipped cream vodka
- Garnish with maraschino cherries

SUPER SIMPLE STRAWBERRY MARGARITA

- 3 ounces white zinfandel
- 4 ounces tequila
- 2 ounces triple sec
- 8 ounces frozen strawberries
- 4 ounces frozen limeade concentrate
- 6 cups blended ice
- Garnish with strawberries and limes



Select a Great Wine Rack

A high-quality wine rack is a must-have, especially as you collect more bottles over the years. If you're looking to expand your storage into a wine cellar or storage area, multiple wine racks may be in your future.

Choosing the right wine racks for your space can be a challenge. That's because without physically having the rack in your home prior to purchase, it's difficult to envision how it will fit and function. This leads us to our first step in selecting a great wine rack.

FINDING THE SPACE

If space is an issue in your home, finding a functional wine rack may take some creativity. Measure the area where you plan to place it, including the depth from which the bottles will stick out once placed on the rack.

Bring your measuring tape to your wine accessory store to make sure you're leaving with a rack that will fit in your desired location.

CONSIDER YOUR WINE'S COMPOSITION

If your wine rack will be in a room-temperature location in the home, it's important to know which wines will retain their flavor and quality in this setting.

Experts recommend that wine stored outside of a cooler be consumed within a couple of months. The humidity level and overall temperature can impact the wine's integrity, so keep this in mind when choosing both your wine rack



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and your wine.

CONSIDER THE SIZE OF YOUR WINE BOTTLES

Certain types of wine bottles, such as magnum sizes, will not fit in the standard openings of many wine racks.

Most champagne bottles also require larger slots. Consider this when purchasing your wine rack.

If you tend to collect a range of bottle sizes, a rack with both standard and large openings may be right for you.

FIND QUALITY RACKS

Every wine drinker would cringe at the sight of a collection of wine bottles hitting the floor due to shoddy wine rack craftsmanship. Make sure this doesn't happen to you by choosing a rack made of

high-quality materials.

Traditional racks were made of wood, but metal racks seem to be rising in popularity. The stability of heavy duty metal wire gives wine drinkers confidence that their prized possessions can rest in safety.

Dry vs. Sweet Wine

Ask any wine drinker if they prefer dry or sweet wine and you're likely to get a distinct answer. Each requires a specific palate to enjoy, and rarely do the two cross over into the same beverage.

For non-regular wine drinkers, however, the difference may be a mystery.

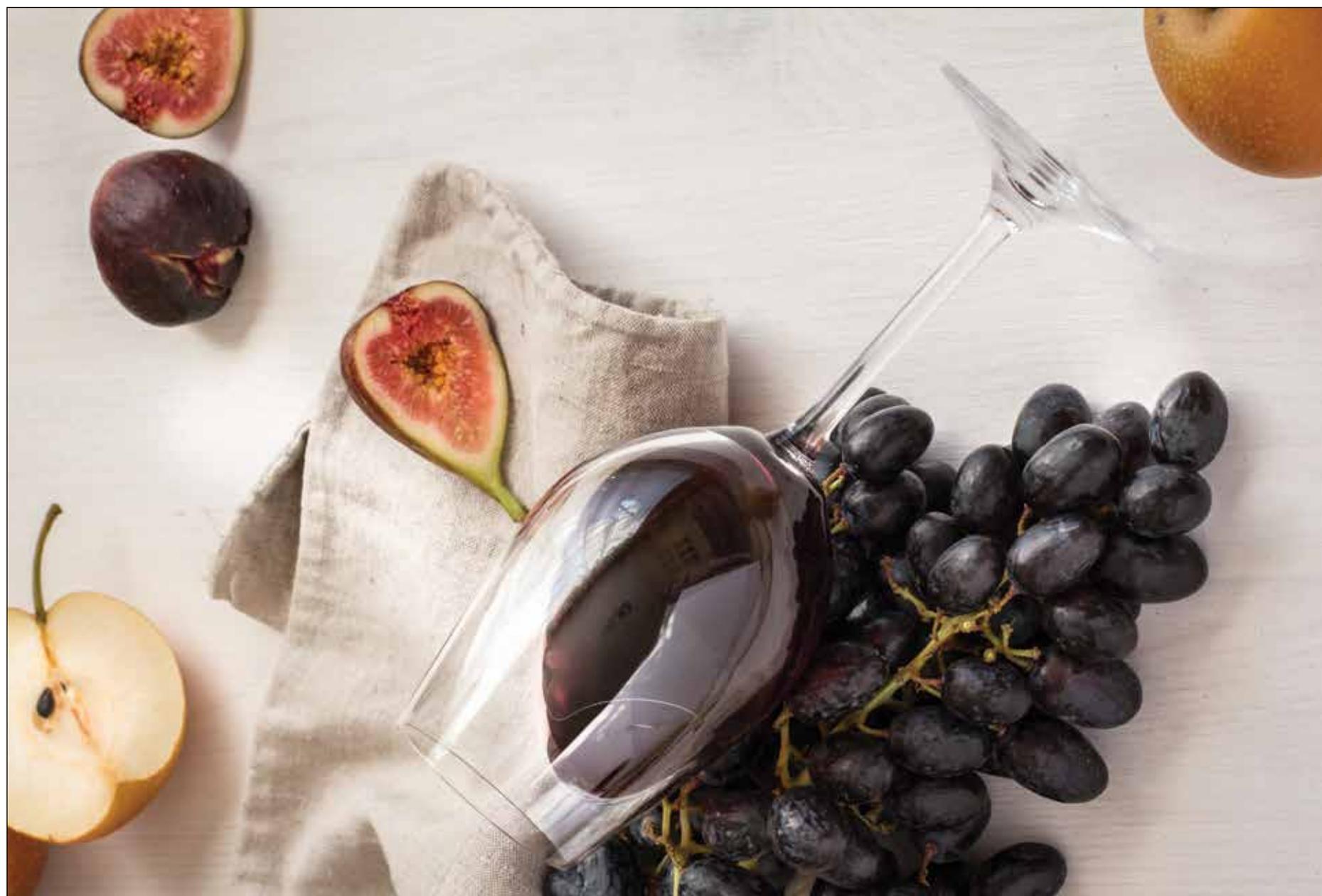
At its most basic level, the variance between the two comes down to sugar. Dry wine is made without the residual sugar that sweetens sweet wine. Residual sugar is defined as the leftovers from the fermentation process. The presence of it in your wine can evoke a sweet or almost bitter taste.

Read on for the most popular kinds of each wine and how you can decide which one you prefer.

DRY WINES

There is a broad array of table or dry wines that people generally prefer with meals. They include cabernet sauvignon, merlot, pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot grigio. Winemakers produce many of these styles in a sweet version, as well, but at their most basic, they are without residual sugar. This can be helpful to know, especially if you are a novice drinker looking to make the transition into wine.

At restaurants, most wines on the non-dessert list will be dry. Keep this in mind when selecting a drink with dinner while you're out with friends or on a date. If you already know that dry wine is



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not your favorite type, steer clear of these options and opt for their sweeter counterparts.

SWEET WINES

There are hundreds of kinds

of sweet or dessert wines on the market. These can include sparkling options with bubbles and high acidity. Lightly sweet options such as Riesling are generally infused with a mix of

fruit flavors, making them the perfect complementary drink to various desserts.

Always ask your waiter or bartender which dish pairs best with the wine you have select-

ed. You don't want to choose a dessert that overwhelms the wine or vice versa. The key is finding a great balance between the two that leads to mealtime bliss.

Host a Wine Tasting Party

With the weather improving and temperatures warming, party season is just around the corner. What's better than mixing your favorite wines and foods with your favorite friends, neighbors and family members?

It's time to throw the perfect wine tasting party.

Pulling off the party of the season is easy with the right preparation and execution. Hosting a wine tasting party is a great way to not only socialize but also learn and teach about your favorite wines.

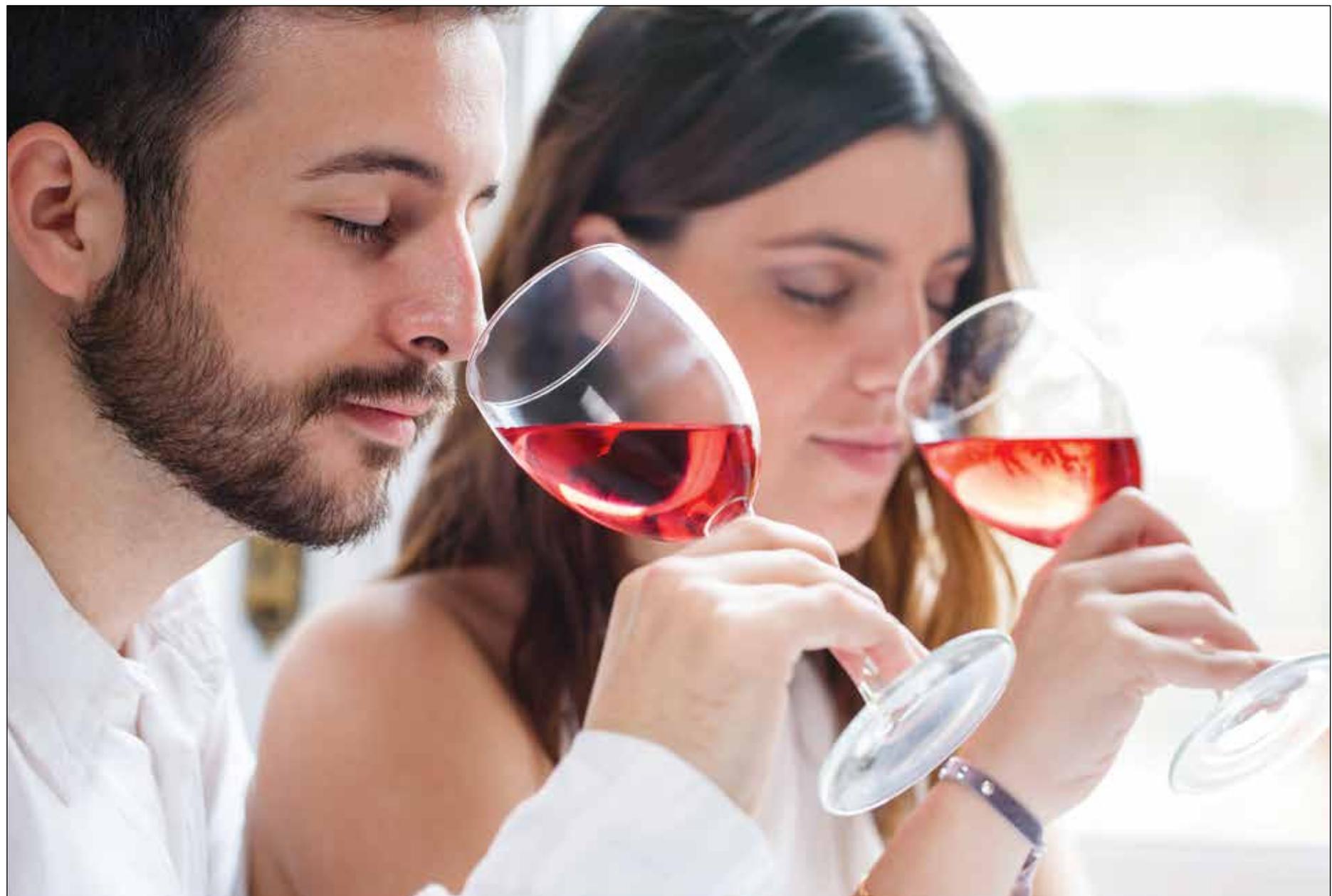
Wine is a complex subject because of its many makes and styles. Different people have different tastes when it comes to wine, so the more you can learn about it the better. Below are a few ideas that can help you as you plan your party.

Wine tastings are fun because they allow you to taste wines that you may not otherwise try. The ideal time for tasting is before a lunch or dinner so guests can get a sense of which types of wine they like, and then pour themselves a glass with their meal.

Here's how to set up the perfect tasting:

- Set your tasting table with four to six sample glasses in front of each party-goer. For added fun and mystery, place a numbered piece of paper next to each glass, waiting until the end of the party to reveal what types of wine your guests are tasting.

- An ounce of wine per sample is plenty for each glass, especially if you're hosting a larger gathering. You want t



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have enough wine for dinner and dessert.

- Be diverse with your offerings, selecting at least two table wines and dessert wines. Your guests will appreciate variety

instead of all dry red wines or all sweet options.

- Offer your guests bread, crackers and cheese to snack on during the tasting. This will help cleanse the palate

between tastings.

- Encourage conversation about the wines with your guests. Take a vote on favorites. Ask for specifics about taste, smell and texture. Keep the

conversation light. Even if you're an expert in wine, you don't want to intimidate any of your guests or make them uncomfortable about stating their opinion.

What Are Tannins?

You've heard wine experts talk about tannins and their impact on a wine's flavor, texture and style. But what exactly are tannins? Can you see them? Do they make that much of a difference?

Tannins are actually macromolecules found in various plants, seeds, wood and fruit skins. They are naturally occurring and most commonly found in red wines. Read on to learn more about this special characteristic of wine. You'll be educating your fellow wine-drinkers in no time.

TANNIN AND TASTE

Ever wonder why drinking some wines leads to a distinctly dry taste on the middle of your tongue and front part of your mouth? You can thank tannin for that. Tannin is the textural element that gives wine its dry characteristic, most commonly in red wines.

Some wine types have higher levels of tannins than others. That's because some grapes made to produce them are loaded with tannins, while others may have far fewer. The dryer your wine tastes, the better the likelihood of it being high in tannin.

Classics such as cabernet sauvignon or nebbiolo are two of the most high-tannin wines, while pinot noir, merlot and gernache are traditionally low in tannin.

THE SOURCE OF TANNIN

Tannin comes from a variety of sources in nature.



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According to the Food and Drug Administration, tannin is present in grapes, pomegranates, tea leaves, dark chocolate, walnuts, almonds and nuts with skin.

In the case of wine, it comes from grape skins, seeds and stems. Red wines are so dry because of the extended time required to produce it, which leaves the

juice in contact longer with the tannin-loaded portions of the grape.

Wood tannins also can dissolve into wine when it is stored in barrels or aged with

oak chips. So while red wines are more often to be associated with the dry, astringent taste, white wine aged in wooden barrels can have the same flavor distinction.



Wine by the Numbers

Research shows that wine consumption is on the rise. There have been increases every year since 2000, reports the Wine Institute.

Through economic downturns and enhanced competition in a crowded marketplace, wine has been resilient and able to remain a popular option.

The Wine Institute also reports that trends continue to point to consumers purchasing more expensive wines to complement their meals, gatherings and times of relaxation. This purchasing pattern has winemakers everywhere optimistic about what the future holds for their businesses.

The three largest wine-producing states are California,

Washington and Oregon, though growers and manufacturers are seeing gains throughout the country. Here is a look at even more positive statistics and facts surrounding the wine industry, as researched and reported by the Wine Institute:

- Revenues for United States wine sales were \$37.6 billion in 2014, up a full percentage point from 2013.
- The United States is the largest wine consuming nation, tracking back to 2010.
- 2014 marked the 22nd con-

secutive year of growth for United States wine sales. In a market that has seen explosive growth from craft beer and novelty drinks, this statistic shows wine's staying power.

- The percentage of American adults who drink wine is 40 percent; 33 percent drink wine several times per week and 67 percent drink wine occasionally.
- Sustainably produced wines are capturing a larger portion of the market, with 16 percent of American wine consumers seeking out these types of wines.

From the growing process to the art of production, buyers want to know how their wine was made and what kinds of practices the company has in place to protect the environment.

- Technology is playing a major role in guiding consumer behavior, with 36 percent of U.S. consumers using mobile wine applications to check prices and reviews before they buy. This trend gives winemakers an insight into what types of information may be influencing buying trends.