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Your guide to vegan wine

Vegan Wine Guide

By Kerrie



Wine is fermented grape juice, and yeasts—either natural or added— the grapejuicesugarsareconvertedintoalcohol. Soundslikeastraightforward path to veganhood, right? Unfortunately, wine can't always be classified as vegan or even vegetarian. Read on to learn the what, why, how, and where of vegan wine.

Is wine vegan?

Young wines are hazy and contain tiny molecules such as proteins, off-flavors, and excess tannins. These are natural and not harmful to consume, yet you rarely see them because wine



drinkers often prefer their wine clear and free of sediment, so the proteins are filtered out before bottling. If given enough time, most wines will self-stabilize and clarify naturally, but in order to ship their wines to market as quickly as possible winemakers often add fining agents to speed up the process.

Fining agents act like magnets – attracting the protein and rough tannins around them. The

molecules then coagulate, creating fewer but larger particles which can then be more easily removed. Common fining agents used to clarify wine include: casein (milk protein), albumin (egg whites), gelatin (animal protein), and isinglass (fish bladder protein). Wines that use these fining agents aren't vegan, and—depending on the original fining agent—may not even be vegetarian.

Luckily, there are vegan wine options on the market and vineyards seem to be producing more every year. The best way to find and drink vegan wine is to educate yourself on what makes or doesn't make a vegan wine, learn about popular vegan wines available today, check out resources dedicated to a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle, and uncork a bottle to congratulate yourself on all of your wine education.

Common fining agents

- **Casein:** milk protein that gives white wines a brilliant clarity and removes oxidative taint.
- **Albumin:** oldest method of wine fining that uses egg whites. Young tannins have a negative ionic charge, while the egg whites have a positive charge, helping the two substances bind together and sink to the bottom of the barrel. This method is still used in Bordeaux, France.
- **Gelatin:** protein derived from animal hides and bones. Used on both red and white wines.
- **Isinglass:** protein derived from swim bladders of sturgeon fish. This method used to be more



popular but has fallen out of popularity. Used for white wines.

- **Milk products:** pasteurized whole, skim, or half-and-half used for grape wine or sherry to remove off flavors.
- **Protease (Trypsin):** protein derived from pig or cow pancreas to remove volatile proteins.
- **Protease (Pepsin):** protein derived from pig or cow stomachs to remove volatile proteins.
- **Chitosan:** carbohydrate derived from crustacean shells. Used in white wines.

Unless wine undergoes self-finishing or uses a non-animal-based fining agent, it won't be vegan.

What's vegan wine?

Vegan wine is wine that: (1) hasn't been fined using an animal-based fining agent or (2) has been allowed to self-clarify over a longer period of time. All wine has the potential to be vegan

if the winemaker elects to use a vegan-friendly fining agent.

Vegan-friendly wine fining agents

- **Bentonite:** purified clay that binds to proteins in white and rosé wines and improves heat stability. Most popular vegan-friendly fining agent.
- **Activated Charcoal:** carbon that strips off undesirable flavors but risks stripping away too much.
- **PVPP:** human-made plastic that strips excess tannins and colors.

How to find vegan wine

Unfortunately, wine labels are not required by US law to disclose: if they're vegan or vegetarian, what ingredients are used, or how they were clarified. There is intense debate in legislative circles around ingredient labeling in wine and beer, so as the public continues to demand

transparency, I would anticipate this law will evolve. Some winemakers are choosing to voluntarily include this information but the vast majority do not label ingredients yet.

Therefore, when looking for vegan wine, there are two main options: wines labeled as “unfined” or those that specifically state they’re vegan friendly.

- **“Unfined” wines:** allowed to self-clarify over time. There are an increasing number of winemakers who want to create wine in the most natural way possible and believe that fining agents strip out too much of wine’s natural flavors and colors. Intervention is kept to a minimum.

- **Vegan-friendly labels:** this is a voluntary choice by winemakers. Some brands choose to self-identify as vegan and some brands are vegan but do not label themselves as such. I’ve included an overview of common vegan winemakers below.

Beyond the label, I recommend consulting with your local wine shops, talking to the sommelier at a restaurant, doing a quick Google search of your favorite vineyards and potential purchases, and consulting the [Barnivore](#). The Barnivore is a comprehensive database that covers vegan wine, beer, and liquor.

If you find exceptional vegan wines, spread the word and thank the businesses that carry them!

The more customer demand for ingredient labeling and vegan wines, the more likely that winemakers will start producing wines that everyone can drink.

Popular vegan wines

Don’t have time to hunt down a vegan bottle? Here are five options that are widely available to get you started.

(1) **Frey Vineyards:** vegan, organic, biodynamic, and produced without any added sulfites or synthetic preservatives. The winery produces a wide range of wines from Chardonnay to Cabernet Sauvignon to Pinot Noir and rosé. Based in Mendocino County, California.

(2) **La Crema:** vegan wine produced sustainably with approval by the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. La Crema produces a range of varietals and is based in Sonoma, California.

(3) **Meiomi:** produced in Monterey, Sonoma, and Santa Barbara, California. Only their Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are vegan so make sure to look at your labels carefully.

(4) **Moët & Chandon:** sparkling vegan wine alert. Powerhouse champagne producer Moët.

(5) **Sutter Home:** if you’re on the prowl for some cheap vegan wine that is literally available almost everywhere, look for Sutter Home Riesling, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gewürztraminer, and Chenin Blanc. Not my favorite from a drinking perspective but it does win points for being vegan and widely available.

Vegan wine pairing

So now you have a bottle of vegan wine but you’re not quite what to make for dinner. Look no further.

When you have a vegan meal, focus on pairing with the most prominent flavors. For example, if you have spaghetti with a tomato sauce, focus on the acidic tomato flavors. If you have a vegan bowl with veggies, tofu, and a cashew based





sauce, focus on the nutty creaminess of the cashew sauces ([Source](#)). More specifics below:

- Green Vegetables (avocados, kale, broccoli, green beans)
- Pair with sparkling or light whites
- Root Vegetables (carrots, squash, pumpkin, sweet potato, potato)
- Pair with full-bodied white, aromatic white, rosé, or light red
- Alliums (garlic, onion, shallots)
- Dream big here. Will pair with almost anything.
- Nightshades (tomato, eggplant, bell peppers)
- Pair with aromatic white, rosé, medium red, full-bodied red
- Beans (black, lentil, pinto, white)

- Pair with sparkling, rosé, light red, medium red

- Fungi (Chanterelle, Crimini, Maitake, Shitake)
- Pair with full-bodied white, light red, medium red, full-bodied red
- Nuts (peanut, almond, pecan, cashew)
- Pair with aromatic white, rosé, or dessert wine
- Fresh Herbs (basil, cilantro, dill, mint)
- Pair with sparkling wine, light white, full-bodied white, aromatic white, rosé, light red
- Pepper (Chipotle, Chili, Ancho)
- Pair with sparkling wine, aromatic white, rosé, or medium red

These vegan wine pairing guidelines are meant to serve as high-level reference points for thinking through your pairing decisions. Plant

& Vine suggests particular varietals of wine for each recipe. Check out some [recipes](#) for wine pairing examples. If you're interested in learning more about how to pair wine and food, visit the Plant & Vine full [wine pairing guide](#).

Should I decant my wine?

The simple answer is yes. The longer answer is that if you drink wine on a regular basis, a wine decanter is a good investment. Decanting wine involves the act of pouring wine from its original vessel, the bottle, to a container with more breathing room.

By decanting the wine, you achieve two goals – increasing oxygen exposure and reducing sediment prior to serving. Both of these actions improve the taste of your wine by softening tannins, releasing residual sulfur dioxide, and letting the wine breathe (which lets you smell and taste the true aromas of the wine more easily).

Final thoughts on vegan wine

Finding vegan wine can be challenging. I recommend consulting with your local favorite wine shops, doing a quick Google search of your favorite vineyards and potential purchases, and consulting [Barnivore](#).

When serving with a meal, remember: pairing wine with food is an art not a science. There are no right answers. Good wine pairings are about what you like – not what Plant & Vine, your local sommelier, or a wine club recommends. I'm just here to encourage you to learn about wine and to get you excited about trying different combinations that will help you figure out what you like. If you enjoy learning about wine and want to take your wine knowledge to the next level, check out my official [wine pairing guide for vegan vegetarian food](#) and [recommended wine drinker books](#).



About the author...

Kerrie is a plant-based wine connoisseur and self-proclaimed perpetual food and wine student. She is the photographer, content developer and creator of [Plant & Vine](#). Inspired to adopt a more wholesome 'veganish' lifestyle after being diagnosed with breast cancer at just 30 years old, she was confronted with the fact that many wines are not even vegetarian let alone vegan. Kerrie has made it her mission to demystify the world of wine processing and swat up on which wines are vegan and vegetarian so we don't have to.