

THE WINE AROMA WHEEL

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The benefits of describing wines in specific terms, such as these on the Wine Aroma Wheel, are your greater enjoyment and appreciation of the wonderful world of wine, plus an enhanced ability to discriminate and remember wine flavors. Describing wine aroma is very simple with the help of this lexicon. Words are arranged in three tiers, from the most general in the center to the most specific in the outer ring. Terms for similar aromas are located adjacent to each other where possible. The distinctive aromas of varietal wines can often be recognized by the specific aroma notes listed to the right. To illustrate these terms, amount of vanilla extract or piece of bell pepper to a neutral white or red wine as a reference for the vanilla or bell pepper aroma.

Much of the aroma in wine comes from the starting grapes and contributes to their distinctive, varietal flavors. Winemaking operations modify these aromas in characteristic ways. Malolactic fermentation produces a buttery aroma, for example, while aging in oak cooperage contributes vanilla and clove notes to Chardonnays and most red wines. In contrast, Muscat, Riesling and Gewürztraminer have citrus, lychee or floral notes which come from the grape. Similarly, Sauvignon Blanc from cool climates is recognizable by the presence of herbaceous (bell pepper or asparagus) notes which arise from the grape.

Characteristic Varietal Wine Aromas

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, Cabernet Franc (and red Bordeaux wines)
Berry, vegetative or herbaceous (bell pepper, asparagus, olives), mint, black pepper, butter, vanilla, soy (in older wines).

Pinot Noir and red Burgundies
Berry, berry jam (strawberry), vanilla, buttery, spicy

Zinfandel

Berry, black pepper, raisin, soy, butter, vanilla.

Chardonnay (and white Burgundies)
Fruity (apple, peach, citrus, pineapple), spicy (cloves, vanilla, butter).

Sauvignon Blanc

Floral, fruity (apple, peach, apricot), vegetative or herbaceous (bell pepper, asparagus), vanilla, butter, spicy (cloves).

White Riesling (and white German wines)
Floral, fruity (apple, peach, citrus, pineapple), honey.

Gewürztraminer

Floral, fruity (citrus, grapefruit, peach, honey, spice).

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