

From delicate to bold and colourful: The 2022 vintage in the German winegrowing regions

The 2022 vintage has already earned a distinction: it thrived in the sunniest summer since records began. Until it reached the cellars, however, the vines and winegrowers experienced stressful times. As in the previous year, the month of September proved to be decisive for the quality of the vintage. This year, after the drought, it brought the long-awaited rain. Until then, the winegrowing regions had not only experienced an enormous amount of sun, but the heat was also accompanied by a drastic lack of water, which in some places caused the soil to dry out deeply. This was particularly difficult for young vines.

In contrast to the previous year, there were hardly any problems with plant protection, which made the organic winegrowers particularly happy. The September rain caused the small grapes to swell, while at the same time dampening the increase in must weights and thus preventing the wines from becoming too alcohol-heavy. The young wines were able to retain their fruitiness and impress with aromas typical of the grape variety. The acidity of the 2022 wines is less pronounced than last year because it was broken down more quickly in the heat.

The red wines benefited particularly from the sun. They are very colour-intensive, light to full-bodied depending on the variety, and can probably be stored for a very long time. The fresh and fruity white wines appear rather lean, sometimes even delicate and light-bodied, and appear ready to drink early.

There is enough wine in the cellars if you look at the nationwide harvest volume. Compared to the previous year, it rose by an estimated six percent to 8,993,500 hectolitres and would therefore be two percent above the long-term average. However, there are major differences both within the wine regions and among themselves, depending on water availability, grape variety levels and soil conditions.

The German Wine Institute (DWI) reveals how the current vintage has developed in the 13 winegrowing regions.

Ahr (564 ha)

16 months after the devastating flood in the Ahr Valley, the winegrowers in "Germany's red wine paradise" can now celebrate a success story. Despite the hot summer, the current harvest is

estimated at around 43,000 hectolitres - 13 percent more than the long-term average and 39 percent more than last year. This is an "excellent result" when you consider that around 40 hectares of vineyard area is still unproductive due to the flood disaster, says Dr. Knut Schubert, Managing Director of the Ahr Winegrowers' Association. The main reason for the increase: compared to other regions, the Ahr was lucky to have had sporadic rain in July and August. After a comparatively warm spring with little rain, the harvest of the early varieties began at the beginning of September, around two weeks earlier than in 2021.

The leading variety, Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder), which has a share of 85 percent in the Ahr, was able to increase its must weight again during the harvest phase at the end of September and beginning of October "in mostly sunny late summer weather" and reached an average of 90 degrees Oechsle. This was different for Riesling, which according to Schubert, had problems with "stem rot", particularly on heavy soils. In the case of medium-ripening varieties such as Frühburgunder, good and occasionally even high qualities were harvested in above-average quantities. Winegrowers' President Hubert Pauly was "very satisfied". Quantities and qualities are excellent, the wines developed promisingly in the cellars. "What we definitely expect are fruity wines," says Schubert. According to him, the Ahr winemakers are again serving the "increasing consumer demand for lean, lighter wines" this year. About 30 percent of the Pinot Noir is used for Blanc de Noir, the popular white wine made from red grapes. The "classic product" of the Ahr, however, remains red wine, according to Schubert.

Baden (15,783 ha)

Thanks to well-distributed rainfall, Germany's southernmost and warmest winegrowing region, Baden, came through the hot summer "with the best results". The rain did not fall in September, as it did elsewhere, but in August and accompanied the harvest, which lasted several weeks and also benefited from cool temperatures. Conclusion: "We have a good vintage in terms of both quality and quantity in the cellar," says Holger Klein, Managing Director of the Baden Winegrowers' Association. About 1.35 million hectolitres of must were harvested, 13 percent more than the long-term average and 50 percent more than in the previous year, when frost and vine diseases had reduced the volume. "In mid-August, nobody would have expected such a yield," explained Klein. "However, the vintage turned around again significantly in the last few weeks before harvest." Even North Baden, which was disadvantaged in terms of rain, had caught up "shortly before the harvest".

There were losses in young vineyards or in locations with light, sandy soils; in extremely dry locations, irrigation was also used. It was a very good year for the Pinots, says Klein, who also spoke of noble sweet specialties. Beeren- and Trockenbeerenauslese wines were also harvested at the end of October. However, the focus will be more on the Kabinett and Spätlese (late vintage) range, "not so much on the higher Prädikat wines". "It will definitely be a somewhat lighter year," he

remarked. Since the must weights "didn't overshoot the goal" due to the rain, moderate alcohol levels can be expected, which makes the wine a very pleasant vintage "in terms of drinking enjoyment", "the acidity values are also quite moderate". Moreover, he expects "good aromas to prevail".

Franken (6,174 ha)

After a promising start to the vegetation phase in Franconia, six dry and hot weeks slowed down the vines and sometimes made it necessary to prune the foliage. Especially in the case of high-quality wines, a lot had to be cut away in order to achieve the right results, says Beate Leopold, Managing Director of the Weinbauring Franken. Shortly after the harvest began in September, it became cooler and rained persistently, which caused many berries to "plump up". The winegrowers were pleasantly surprised by the harvest volume, which at around 456,000 hectolitres was six percent above the long-term average and three percent above the previous year's value. "As far as the year goes, there is nothing to complain about," says Hermann Mengler, head of the winery and cellar technology advisory service in the Lower Franconia district. It was not a perfect vintage, but a very good one - better than 2021. Healthy grapes were harvested and thus the prerequisite was met for "sparkling clean" wines with good varietal character and aromas. "We had an excellent red wine vintage," says Mengler.

The red grapes, which account for 17.7 percent share of cultivation, got everything that was needed for a "red wine that is intensely coloured, characteristic of the grape variety and benefits from the ripe tannin structure". Their must weight was predominantly between 90 and 95 degrees Oechsle. Many white wines reached values between 79 and 85 degrees. They are "very lean and light, it's a vintage that embraces you openly and doesn't need a long storage period," says Mengler. "It just says, here I am, drink me!" While Silvaner, the main grape variety, coped well with the weather, according to Mengler, Riesling suffered in the rain, and there were losses of up to 80 percent for Bacchus.

Hessische Bergstraße (462 ha)

Even if it was a long, hot and dry summer: for the smallest German winegrowing region, the Hessische Bergstrasse, it ended wet - and because of the associated danger of spoilage, also with the necessary haste to harvest the grapes. When the main harvest for the early varieties began around Heppenheim and Bensheim on September 5th, the winegrowers were dealing with "healthy, fully ripe grapes and very satisfactory must weights", as reported by Otto Guthier, chairman of the Hessische Bergstrasse Winegrowers' Association. However, in the second third of September it began to rain heavily, which made a speedy harvest advisable, especially for compact grape bunches, as the plump berries threatened to burst. Harvest for the main variety, Riesling, started on

September 12th, Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) and Chardonnay followed shortly thereafter, and Pinot Gris (Grauburgunder) had been harvested from September 10th.

Although rain repeatedly made harvesting difficult, the Pinot varieties were mostly harvested in good health, reaching must weights of 93 to 94 degrees Oechsle for the Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir, and the Chardonnay even one degree higher. The Riesling, whose picking lasted until October 12 due to a difficult harvest run, reached an average of 80 degrees. While the harvest volume of an estimated 31,000 hectolitres is three percent higher than the long-term average and the previous year, and corresponds to "a normal year", the qualities are "good to very good" according to Guthier. Fruity-fresh white and robust red wines are expected, "which are certainly suitable for longer storage".

Mittelrhein (468 ha)

This year, the winegrowers on the Middle Rhine have experienced that a lot of sunshine hours do not always have to be followed by very high must weights. Although they have a wine that "the majority of consumers would like to have", it is not what would have been expected given the amount of sunshine, says the President of the Mittelrhein Winegrowers' Association, Heinz-Uwe Fetz. "With these hours of sunshine, people expect must weights of around 90 to 100 degrees Oechsle, but that's far from the case." There are "peaks", but in small quantities, for example after selection. In the majority of the wines, the must weights were "around 80 degrees", they were "very good Kabinett wines", with not too much alcohol, a very structured, fine acidity, which are probably ready to drink in spring. The vines in the region between Bingen and Bonn, which is characterized by terraces and steep slopes, had experienced a "stagnated growth" in the summer due to the drought. Although there was hardly any need for plant protection due to the lack of rain, the vintners had to transport water to the vines during this time. But when a "perceptible" rain finally fell in September, it was four weeks too late for the Riesling grapes. "It wasn't the best Riesling year," says Fetz. In his view, the winners are the Pinot (Burgunder) varieties, which achieved "significantly better yields and also significantly better must weights". Fetz also envisages "very good" red wines, "the colouration was of course intense due to the hours of sunshine". The harvest volume in the Mittelrhein rose by 15 percent year-on-year to 30,000 hectoliters, which was seven percent more than the long-term average.

Mosel (8,664 ha)

July temperatures up to 40 degrees and a water deficit of up to 210 litres per square metre: Summer was relentless on the Mosel, which is characterized by steep slopes. This was felt above all by Riesling vines, with a harvest share of 61 percent the most important grape variety in the winegrowing region, where the harvest began "record-breakingly early" on August 20th. When rain finally fell in September, it came three to four weeks too late for the Riesling. In view of the

unpredictable weather, the winegrowers of the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer valleys speak overall of a good vintage with satisfactory quality and quantity - also because initially "significantly less wine" had been expected. While the drought caused problems for young plants and vines, particularly those on soil with little storage capacity, older vines coped well because "their roots, which reach many meters deep, were still able to access water".

In the end, 688,000 hectolitres of wine must ended up in the cellars, seven percent less than the long-term average and six percent less than in the difficult rainy year of 2021. Light, aromatic and harmonious white wines, which make up more than 90 percent of the harvest, as well as intensively coloured red and rosé wines are expected. According to Moselwein, the acidity levels are low throughout. Under optimal conditions, the Pinot varieties reached must weights of up to 90 degrees Oechsle and more, the average was 85 degrees. The Riesling also reached 90 degrees in places, but grapes with Spätlese and Auslese quality (late harvest) as well as for noble sweet rarities remained the exception, with the majority between 70 and 80 degrees. The alcohol content is described as moderate and in line with prevailing market trends.

Nahe (4,237 ha)

According to the motto "better late than never", the rain in September put an end to months of drought in the Nahe winegrowing region. By then, the approximately eleven-day vegetation lead that the vines still had at the beginning of flowering had been reduced to three days due to the drought. Young vines had to be irrigated in places, but mature ones rarely had to be watered. Although there were hopes for good quality, at the same time there were fears that the harvest could be extremely small due to the drought, says Harald Sperling, Managing Director of the Nahe Winegrowers' Association. "Of course, the berries were relatively small." However, the rain "didn't come too late": the grapes soaked up a bit more and, according to Sperling, impressed the vintners with "a good to sometimes very good quality and a good quantity". A total of an estimated 319,000 hectolitres of must ended up in the cellars, as much as the long-term average and seven percent more than in 2021. From Sperling's point of view, that is "quite alright". However, even on the Nahe, the harvest quantities are distributed very differently. When asked about the winners, Sperling emphasized the red wines as well as Pinot Blanc (Weissburgunder) and Pinot Gris (Grauburgunder), but all grape varieties, including Riesling, had a share of Prädikat wines, some of which reached must weights of up to 100 degrees Oechsle. The Prädikatswein share is estimated at 15 to 20 percent, the rest is made up of the "good to very good quality wine vintage". "Overall, it was a lighter vintage," says Sperling. We can expect "lighter, more delicate wines" with medium body and positively developed varietal aromas that are not overcome by alcohol and "a restrained but nevertheless fresh acidity".

Pfalz (23,759 ha)

Because of its mild climate, the Palatinate is familiar with heat, but the hot summer of 2022 also posed special challenges for Germany's second largest winegrowing region. According to Pfalzwein e.V., after an early flowering and even ripening of the berries, the summer showed its hottest side. In addition, due to a lack of rain in July and August, there was too little water in many places, which caused "enormous stress" especially for young vines. The long-awaited rain did fall in time for the harvest, "but sometimes too frequently and too heavily with isolated heavy rainfall events," says Jürgen Oberhofer from the Service Center for Rural Areas in Rheinland-Pfalz (DLR). Overall, however, the rainy phase from mid-September ensured that the must weights only increased very slowly, so that the "mostly healthy grapes" could continue to grow. The estimates for this year's wine must harvest are around 2.3 million hectolitres, which is four percent above the previous year's value and the long-term average. Even though it was an "extreme vintage" with varying results in places, the winemakers promise "excellent wines", finely fruity, "with a fresh character and significantly less acidity compared to the 2021 vintage", according to the 1st Chairman of Pfalzwein, Boris Kranz. DLR expert Oberhofer says that, as in 2018 and 2020, the drought and heat had hardly any effect on the resulting taste "thanks to adapted grape processing". "The white wines taste fruity, clear and precise." He also expects excellent red wines, which would be "very structured, colourful and expressive", especially those made from international grape varieties.

Rheingau (3,197 ha)

Satisfied with the current results but knowing that one must continue to prepare for future extreme situations: This is the conclusion drawn by the Managing Director of the Rheingau Winegrowers' Association, Dominik Russler, after the hot season of 2022. It was inconsistent, with the condition of the vines varying according to location and management methods – from very good to major drought damage. The harvest also varied: for example, winegrowers on steep slopes without much fine soil harvested only 15 hectolitres per hectare, while on deep soils they harvested more than 100 hectolitres. According to Russler, some winegrowers removed all the grapes from their young plants that were starving in the heat and drought so that the vines could survive. In total, an estimated 219,000 hectolitres of must were harvested, three percent more than the long-term average and two percent more than in 2021. According to Russler, the winegrowers expect "a good to very good vintage" for Riesling, which is the main variety with a share of over 70 percent. "Great, market-oriented wines that are not so alcohol-heavy". The must weights had stagnated from a certain point in time, the average was 80 to 85 degrees Oechsle. Nevertheless, the grapes were very ripe and aromatic. Because of the heat, malic and tartaric acid were strongly reduced, which is why a "very, very well integrated and moderate acidity" is expected. Some winegrowers have also successfully speculated on Beeren- and Trockenbeerenauslese wines. Everyone was "very, very satisfied" with the Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder), which was almost completely harvested before the first rain and had a must weight of between 85 and 95 degrees Oechsle. It was also characterized by excellent aromas

and a high basic content of primary aromas. "The varietal characteristics will be relatively well developed," says Russler. With a view to future measures against the drought, he named irrigation as a "key issue".

Rheinhessen (27,159 ha)

Even if the weather this year was not ideal for Riesling, Andreas Köhr from the Farmers' and Winegrowers' Association of Rheinland-Pfalz South believes that the wines made from Rheinhessen's main grape variety are again this year as they could only be when made in Germany: with moderate alcohol content, a very expressive and fruity aroma and an acidity "that makes the whole thing fresh". Conclusion: "We were lucky", because without the cooling in September, the typical Riesling freshness could have suffered. Overall, from Köhr's point of view, the winegrowers in Germany's largest winegrowing region got off lightly. They brought in a wine must harvest of an estimated 2.47 million hectolitres - two percent less than the ten-year average and nine percent less than in the rainy previous year. If you look at the numbers, you might think that everyone would be disappointed, but actually "satisfaction prevailed in Rheinhessen - because we had expected much lower quantities in the meantime," explained Köhr. The September rains came just in time and had a positive effect on quality and quantity.

However, there are very different yields for the grape varieties within the region because it only rained locally in the summer. The weather "played into the hands" of the red wine varieties, which grow on about 30 percent of the cultivation area in Rheinhessen; in terms of color intensity and tannin structure, they need not fear comparison with international varieties. Thanks to excellent ripeness, the winegrowers "got the style they wanted for their range" when they decided on the time of harvest. The rain also slowed down the increase in must weights and thus also the later alcohol content of the wines, which meets the needs of consumers, said Köhr.

Saale-Unstrut (837 ha)

After four years with "small" harvests, the hot summer of 2022 of all things finally brought the Saale-Unstrut winegrowing region a satisfactory quantity. With around 54,000 hectolitres, the result in the northernmost German growing region exceeds the long-term average by 23 percent and the previous year, which was characterized by frost-related losses, by as much as 54 percent. In terms of quality, too, the prospects are good. "I reckon that the 22 vintage will be one of the good vintages for Saale-Unstrut," says the President of the Winegrowers' Association, Hans Albrecht Zieger. However, the drought, which is also a "typical feature" on the banks of the Saale and Unstrut, had caused a long period of trepidation. After an optimistic start, the dry summer "pushed expectations down week after week," recalled Zieger.

The September rains came to an end just in time and ensured that the winegrowers "were able to bring in good qualities in the second half of the harvest, especially with the medium and late ripening

varieties". With must weights averaging more than 90 degrees Oechsle, the Pinot varieties, especially Pinot Gris (Grauburgunder) and Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder), mostly reached Prädikat wine levels, as did the Traminer grapes. Because it didn't rain too much, the winegrowers were able to consistently bring in healthy grapes. "We are expecting a fruity vintage with very varietal wines that are not too overloaded, not too powerful," says Zieger. The vintage is also very balanced in terms of acidity. After the temperatures unexpectedly fell to below minus seven degrees Celsius relatively early in the year on the night of November 21, some winegrowers were even able to crown the vintage with ice wine.

Sachsen (509 ha)

"Wine of the century" or "medium-scale catastrophe", both seemed conceivable for Saxony's winegrowers this summer. In the end, the result was somewhere in the middle: "It's a good to very good vintage," says Felix Hößelbarth, chairman of the Sachsen Winegrowers' Association. A persistent lack of rain also affected Germany's easternmost cultivation area. For young and slow-growing vineyards as well as those on the steep slopes of the Elbe valley between Meißen and Dresden, drought stress began as early as June. With grapes fully mature and the start of harvest in mid-August - one of the earliest ever - intense rain set in. "In four to five weeks of harvest we had more rainfall than in the previous seven and a half months," noted Hößelbarth. On the one hand, this had a positive effect because vines that were expected to produce less were still able to absorb the water. At around 23,500 hectolitres, the harvest is expected to be two percent above the long-term average and above the previous year's figure. "If the rain had come a month or two earlier, it could have been a vintage of the century," explained Hößelbarth. Nevertheless, he was pleased, because "we had anticipated a medium-scale catastrophe".

Everything is there in terms of quality. There are top qualities, especially from the steep slopes, which would have coped better with the rain and also "a very good midfield". It was "a bit more difficult" for late-ripening varieties outside of the steep slopes. The vintage has significantly more mature must weights and significantly more mature acidity levels than 2021 and good aromas. You can expect elegant, fruity, fresh white wines. Despite the heat and drought, the "cool-climate wines" that Sachsen stands for were managed yet again. Even with red wine, such as Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder), top quality was achieved on steep slopes. Overall, the average must weight is well over 80 degrees Oechsle. On November 21st, a few wineries in Sachsen were even able to conclude the 2022 vintage with an ice wine harvest.

Württemberg (11,358 ha)

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While the September rains came too late for Riesling in some places, it came as expected for the winegrowers of Württemberg. It was "phenomenal" that there was "rain at just the right time," remarked the Managing Director of the Württemberg Winegrowers' Association, Dr. Hermann Morast, highlighting the vintners' satisfaction. The rain ensured that the grapes, which due to the persistent drought were more like "little berries", were still able to store water and gain weight. It also ensured the quality, affirmed Morast. The grapes remained "vital" and were able to continue to form compounds, aromas and other substances - "all processes that are reduced in dry conditions" - and the must weights, which threatened to explode due to the drought, were "corrected" due to the rain, so that the resulting alcohol content is in line with market trends". The white wines, such as the main grape variety Riesling, are finely fruity, aromatic and rather lean. In terms of acidity, too, the wine is "exactly what the market is currently demanding". Thanks to the rain, Trollinger, the second most prevalent variety after Riesling, became "just what you want" - namely a "light, finely fruity red wine". The wines that were harvested before the rains include Müller-Thurgau and Kerner, two wines that Morast counts among the "winners" - in addition to Lemberger - but that certainly doesn't mean that the other wines are losers, he emphasized. The early wines are "just the way you want them to be", they have comparatively higher alcohol levels without being "brandy-like", while "the fruitiness predominates". His conclusion: With a "market-driven" quantity, which grew by 15 percent compared to 2021 and by two percent compared to the long-term average to an estimated one million hectolitres, consumers could look forward to both full-bodied, intense and distinctive red wines as well as fruity white wines.

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