Get to know your Pennsylvania Grapes

With more than 14,000 acres of vineyards, Pennsylvania is the fifth largest grape growing region in the country. But, it’s not just quantity PA has to offer, we also boast a great variety of grapes - more than two dozen - that flourish throughout the different climate and soil conditions across the state. The best way to get to know our grapes is in a glass, but read on for an introduction to whet your appetite.

ALBARIÑO
(ahl-bah-REE-nyoh); European
This aromatic, floral, and fruity white is typically not aged long with little to no oak influence, allowing its orange blooms, honeysuckle, lemongrass, and green apple flavors to take center stage. Its high acidity makes Albariño a refreshing palate cleanser between intense flavors and an excellent companion to lighter, herby dishes.

BACO NOIR
(BAH-koh NWAHR); Hybrid
Baco Noir is a dark-skinned, French-American hybrid. This versatile grape can be used to produce wines that span the spectrum from resembling a delicate Pinot Noir all the way to a bold, in-your-face Bordeaux. Regardless of style, Baco Noir’s acidity and low tannins pair well with barbecued meats, tomato sauces, and lamb.

CABERNET FRANC
(CAB-er-nay FRANC); European
Similar in name and in flavor to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab Franc is grown in multiple regions of the state. The wine is usually aged in oak which adds even more spice to this already earthy, peppery, and aromatic red. Its balanced tannins and medium-high acidity make it easy to pair with anything: soft cheeses, game meats, or intense, briny flavors like olives, feta, and preserved lemon.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON
(CAB-er-nay SAW-vin-YAWN); European
Pennsylvania’s Cabernet Sauvignon bears a closer resemblance to the herbal, floral European/Old World Cabs than the fruitier varieties that hail from the West Coast, with notes of graphite and tobacco and hints of licorice or black cherry. Its high tannins and complex flavors stand up well to foods that are high in fat, like steak and lamb chops.
CATAWBA  
(*kuh-TAW-buh*); Native
The Catawba grape is primarily grown in the NorthWest region, but can be found across the state. The wine resembles White Zinfandel with a sweeter taste, medium body, and mild acidity. Catawba is best served chilled, and pairs with barbecue, fried chicken, and earthy cheeses.

CAYUGA  
(*kuh-YOO-guh*); Hybrid
The Cayuga grape is a workhorse: it’s cold-hardy, high yielding, disease resistant, reliably high quality, and can be made into dry, sweet, or sparkling styles depending on how early it’s picked. Found all across the state, Cayuga can be paired with anything from lobster rolls to apple pie depending on its style.

CHAMBOURCIN  
(*SHAHM-boor-sin*); Hybrid
If you are a Pinot Noir lover, you’re in luck: Chambourcin is similar to your favorite dry red and can be found all across the state. Often aged in oak barrels to counteract its acidity, Chambourcin has earthy, tobacco, and vanilla aromas and a supple mouthfeel. Pair this versatile red with steak, pasta with red sauce, soft cheeses, or chocolate.

CHANCELLOR  
(*CHAN-suh-ler*); Hybrid
Chancellor’s inky color may seem intimidating, but the wine produced by this hardy grape can be unexpectedly light. The wine’s fruit flavors of soft red cherries, blackberries, and cinnamon pair well with lamb and venison.

CHARDONNAY  
(*SHAR-duh-nay*); European
If Pennsylvania’s Chardonnays might remind you of their European cousins, there’s a reason: PA’s climate and soil conditions are very similar to Europe’s (more so than California or Australia). PA Chardonnays can vary in taste from dry, unoaked styles that can be fruity, floral, and zesty to oaked varieties that can have hints of vanilla and caramel. Pair this versatile white, grown primarily in the SouthCentral and SouthEast regions, with salmon in cream sauce, shellfish, and hearty soups.

CONCORD  
(*KON-chord*); Native
Concord grapes are grown across PA, primarily in the NorthWest region, and most of them become juice or jelly. Others, however, go into this sweet dark red with a strong grapey flavor that pairs well with bold flavors like sharp cheddar, salty foods, spicy seafood, and sweet treats.

*What is a Hybrid grape?*

**Hybrid grapes** are grapes that are created in a lab by crossing two or more grape species and are the babies of the grape growing community. While a few hybrids have been around for decades, some are still being developed and released. Hybrid grapes are designed to be hardy and grow equally well in different climate conditions.
DELAWARE  
(DEH-luh-wair); Native

The Delaware grape, grown across the state, but primarily in the NorthWest region, is similar to the Concord, but has a lighter skin and flavor. The Delaware grape can be made in sparkling or ice wine styles, but is most commonly found as a pleasantly sweet white wine or rosé table wine. Delaware pairs well with salty dishes like prosciutto-wrapped melon or light bites like steak tartare.

GEWÜRZTRAMINER  
(Guh-VERTZ-tra-mean-er); European

As fun to drink as it is to say, Gewürztraminer has strong aromas of wildflowers, roses, and tropical fruits and varying degrees of sweetness. There are not many acres of Gewürztraminer in the U.S., but you can find some in Pennsylvania. The medium to low acidity of this exotic-tasting wine makes it a perfect companion to cuisines like Middle Eastern and Moroccan.

GRÜNER VELTLINER  
(GREW-ner velt-LEE-ner); European

Grüner Veltliner is an aromatic white grape variety that is well-established in the SouthEast region, but is growing in production throughout the state. Similar to Sauvignon Blanc, Grüner wines can have a grassy, green bean, or dill flavor with hints of tropical fruits. The high acidity in this crisp, dry white stands up nicely to spicy Asian dishes, grilled vegetables, and richly flavored foods.

LEMBERGER  
(LEHM-ber-ger); European

A popular, dark-skinned variety, Lemberger has a tannic structure that creates a very masculine wine with dried herb and woody flavors that integrate well with its red fruit nature. Similar to a Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon, this wine does well with some oak influence and aging, and pairs nicely with pasta, roasts, and grilled meats.

MARECHEL FOCH  
(MAH-reh-shal FOSH); Hybrid  
(also referred to as “Foch”)

Marechel Foch is a dark-skinned grape that is found in PA. The wine that it produces can be light red to very dark, with a strong acidity and a relatively neutral flavor. Pair Marechel Foch with roasted leg of lamb.

MERLOT  
(mer-LOW); European

Merlot grapes can be found in the SouthCentral and SouthEast regions of the state and produce red wines that typically have savory and earthy flavors with hints of mushrooms. Climate impacts the wine’s flavor, bringing out jammy tastes with dark fruit notes like black cherry or plum in warmer, drier, or better-ripening years. A lighter to medium Merlot pairs well with charcuterie or meaty pasta dishes, while a heavier-bodied alternative works better with a savory roast.
MOSCATO (mohs-KAA-toh); European
Made from some of the oldest grapes in the world, Moscato is a light-bodied, sweet white wine with tropical fruit notes and floral aromas that can be produced in a slightly fizzy or still style. Often served as a dessert wine, Moscato pairs nicely with fruit and vanilla-flavored desserts, but can also provide a refreshing companion to spicy cuisine.

NIAGARA (nay-AE-gruh); Native
Niagara grapes are grown across PA, primarily in the NorthWest region, and like Concord grapes, mostly go into making juice. When they end up in wine, the grapey flavors come through with candied lemon and floral jasmine aromas. Niagara is a medium-bodied wine that provides a sweet complement to briny shellfish, interesting cheeses, and buttery pastries.

NOIRET (nwahr-ET); Hybrid
This dark-skinned variety is a newer hybrid and is grown in the NorthWest region of the state. Cabernet-like in flavor, Noiret has a black pepper aroma with hints of raspberry and pairs well with pasta or beef dishes such as pot roast.

PINOT GRIGIO/PINOT GRIS (PEE-noh GREE-joe/PEE-noh GREE); European
The Pinot Grigio/Pinot Gris grape is a unique gray color that produces a popular white wine with citrusy fruit flavors. It is typically made in a dry, non-oaky wine style, pairing well with garlicky, oil-based pasta dishes like seafood scampi and veggie-laden primavera.

PINOT NOIR (PEE-noe NWAHR); European
A delicate dark-skinned variety that makes a great introductory red wine or an ideal variety for connoisseurs, Pinot Noir is one of the trickiest wines to make, but when made well, the results can be magical. Equally magical - Pinot Noir is like the Swiss Army knife of wines and can pair with almost anything. It is especially delicious when served with grilled salmon or pork chops.

RIESLING (REES-ling); European
Riesling is common across Pennsylvania, but varies greatly in flavor profile based on region. Wines from the NorthWest region have a sweet peach flavor with a crisp sourness, while SouthCentral varieties have more citrus and floral notes. While traditionally a sweeter wine, drier styles are increasing in popularity throughout the state. Riesling’s sweetness and high acidity makes it a perfect accompaniment to spicy foods.
SAPERAVI
(sah-per-RA-vee); European
Saperavi is a traditionally Georgian grape that thrives in Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna Valley. It can be made into several styles, but is most typically used in full-bodied dry reds. This bold, inky red matches up well with rich, tangy meals such as pizza or barbecue pork.

SEYVAL BLANC
(say-VAHL BLAHNK); Hybrid
Seyval Blanc is famously resistant to cold weather. A neutral, citrusy white wine variety, Seyval Blanc is similar to a French Chablis, and provides a refreshing accompaniment to light salads, shellfish dishes, and mild cheeses.

STEUBEN
(STOO-ben); Hybrid
The Steuben grape, like many hybrids, can be grown in any region of the state. Similar to Concord and White Zinfandel, Steuben is spicy and sweet, with hints of honey, and described as “grape juice with a kick”. Its sweet, gentle flavor pairs well with briny and spicy dishes like linguine in clam sauce and Thai peanut sauce.

SYRAH
(sih-RAH); European
Shiraz drinkers, take note: Shiraz and Syrah are actually two names for the same grape. Syrah can vary in flavor depending on the weather. Warmer growing seasons produce a jammy, red fruit flavors, while cooler growing seasons bring out chocolate, coffee, and earthy notes. Syrah is softer in mouthfeel compared to a Cabernet and pairs well with lamb.

TEROLDEGO
(tehr-AWL-deh-go); European
Teroldego is a red wine grape that has a deep garnet color and produces intensely fruity dry wines that exude flavors of red fruit, pine, and almond. The grape’s vivid acidity makes it wonderful to pair with rich dishes like pierogies with carmelized onions or pasta carbonara.

TRAMINETTE
(TRA-men-et); Hybrid
The aromatic Traminette grape is grown mainly in the NorthCentral, SouthWest, and SouthEast regions of PA, and can produce wines with both dry and sweet styles. The wine’s fresh and floral flavors provide a fine companion for shellfish, gorgonzola, ham, and chicken.

VIDAL BLANC
(vee-DAHL BLAHNK); Hybrid
This white grape is grown across the state, but varies by region. Wines produced in the NorthWest region offer a bright crispness, while those from the SouthCentral region are more floral in flavor. Vidal Blanc often has tropical fruit notes and can be produced in dry, semi-dry, and dessert or ice wine styles. Pair dry styles with light seafood and bright salads, off-dry styles with more substantial dishes and spice, and dessert or ice wine styles with sweet desserts or salty cheeses.

VIGNOLES
(veen-YOL); Hybrid
Vignoles is an aromatic variety with tropical fruit characters. This versatile grape can be aged in oak to produce a Chardonnay-like full-bodied wine, produced in a dessert/ice wine styles to play up its sweet, fruity flavors, or become a gently sweet table wine. Pair Vignoles with spicy foods such as Mexican or Asian dishes.
GET TO KNOW
THE REGIONS OF
Pennsylvania
Wine Land

If you’re impressed by the wide variety of Pennsylvania grapes, you can thank our state’s diverse regional climate. While some grapes flourish across the whole state, slight differences in soil, climate, and slope create unique environments for more fickle varietals.

A 20-mile long and 5-mile wide sea of grapes hug the Lake Erie shoreline. Because of the lake, the surrounding climate is cooler, with adequate air movement and relative consistency in year-to-year weather conditions compared to some other regions.

In the hills around Pittsburgh and the Laurel Highlands, the cooler climate and higher elevations help cold-hardy hybrids, native grapes, and some cool-climate Vitis vinifera varietals to thrive in the shale-based soils.

Below the mountains is the fruit belt of Adams County where apples and peaches thrive. With a longer growing season and higher heat accumulation, several growers opt to produce traditional Bordeaux varieties both white and red in color.

This area is especially diverse with its variation in elevation along the Appalachian Mountain range, diverse soil characteristics, and pockets of microclimates all which allow grapes to grow successfully.

This region is home to the Endless Mountains. Here, cold-hardy hybrid and cool-climate vinifera varietals produce wines of exceptional aroma and fruit flavors.

The SouthEast typically experiences a longer growing season and higher temperatures. The generally hilly terrain of the region offers opportunities for vineyards with south-facing slopes that aid in draining water and maintaining air flow that encourages grapevines to flourish.

To learn (even) more about Pennsylvania grapes, visit PAWineLand.com/WineSchool