

Tempranillo

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Tempranillo is the great red grape of Spain and has grown on the Iberian Peninsula since the time of the Phoenicians. A dark-skinned, red grape, Tempranillo can produce a variety of aromas and flavors depending on where and how it is grown, how it is vinified, and how it is aged. Tempranillo can produce amazing varietal wines but may also be blended to create deliciously complex red wines including Port. This grape is best known for its dominant part in the red wines of Rioja and the Ribera del Duero, but for a long time was not well known outside of Iberia. A few decades ago Tempranillo caught the attention of some outside of Spain and Portugal; now it is the fourth most grown wine grape variety in the world.

The name Tempranillo comes from the Spanish word *temprano*, which means early. This name reflects the grape's tendency to ripen weeks earlier than other Spanish grapes. Tempranillo is grown all over the Iberian Peninsula as well as in several other places around the world. However, many people may not have heard of Tempranillo. This is because in almost every different region it is grown, it goes by a different name. Some of those names include Tinto de Toro, Cencibel, Ull de Llebre (Ojo de Liebre), Tinto de Santiago, Tinto Fino, Tinta Roriz, and Aragonez (Robinson).

Tempranillo originated in Northern Spain, in either Rioja or Navarra. From Spain, Tempranillo spread to many other important wine countries including Portugal, Italy, and Argentina. Tempranillo is also grown in several other countries around the world, but not in high quantities. The grape, however, is best known in Spain and is growing in popularity; in 2010 it was considered to be the fourth most popular wine grape variety. This is in large part thanks to its favor among the Spanish. Without the Spanish enjoying this grape as much as they do, it would be relatively unknown (Clarke).

The primary growing areas of Tempranillo are on the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, those areas are Rioja, the Ribera del Duero, Toro, and Castilla de la Mancha. It is also grown in large quantities

in the regions of Extremadura and Valencia, Spain. The Douro Valley the primary growing area for Tempranillo in Portugal. Secondary growing areas for Tempranillo are Cataluña, Madrid, Murcia, Andalucía in Spain and in Alentejo, Portugal. Outside of the Iberian Peninsula, Tempranillo is grown in smaller amounts in Herault Aude, Southern France; New South Wales, Australia; Hawke's Bay, New Zealand; Morocco; Cape Town, South Africa. In the United States some Tempranillo grows in the Willamette Valley, as well as in Napa, California and Washington State (Clarke).

While Tempranillo grows in many locations all over the world, the best locations for growth is in cool climates such as Rioja. The grape ripens early, but buds late. This leads to a very short growing period that is suited for cooler regions and high altitudes. At the same time “to get high sugar levels and the thick skins that give the deep color you need heat...best reconciled in the continental climate but high altitude of the Ribera del Duero” (Clarke). These growing conditions also impact the traits of the grapes. In the cooler climates Tempranillo develops a low acidity level (Robinson). Tempranillo grown in warmer climates leads to a fuller bodied wine, higher sugar and alcohol levels with low tannin and acidity (Clarke). Since it can grow in both cold and warm climates it is pretty adaptable and can survive harsh weather, which effects the levels of acidity, tannin, and sugar. The main susceptibility is not the weather but rot due to its thin skin (Robinson). Thankfully this is not that big of a problem since in some climates the skin can become thicker.

The soil also impacts the growth of Tempranillo. The best types of Tempranillo grow in soil that is chalky and contains clay and limestone. The chalk and clay create the acidity and elegance in the grapes while the limestone allows the vines to easily access and store water. In good growing conditions with an ideal climate and soil, Tempranillo is considered a yield sensitive grape and can overgrow, causing the grapes to be lower in quality. Since it can be produced in high quantities along with its adaptable growing characteristics, Tempranillo is an easy grape to grow

making it an increasingly popular grape grown in vineyards (Clarke). Traditionally in the vineyard, Tempranillo is grown *en vaso* or as “little low bush vines... although some growers have been training it up a trellis to increase yields” (Robinson).

Tempranillo behaves as a fairly standard grape in the winery. The vinification process is similar to many other grapes, but it does have a lower maceration time, to prevent the wine from becoming too oily. After maceration, the wine ferments in oak barrels, usually French oak. American oak was used more often, but now French is the popular choice. The aging process is far more important for this grapes flavor profile than the terroir. Tempranillo can stand alone in a wine, but it is often blended with small amounts from other grapes to add some complexity.

Once the grape has been turned into wine, it has several classic characteristics. Tempranillo will typically range from a medium ruby to medium garnet color because the grapes have a relatively thin skin. The wine will also be fairly translucent. Tempranillo does not have any bubbles, but it can have sediment if it has been aged. As for the nose, classic aromas are blackberry, dark cherry, plum, herbs, and fresh tobacco leaves. Jancis Robinson described the aroma as “sappy, fresh and vegetal..., but [there is] also something definitively masculine, the sort of smells you would expect to find in a stereotypical gentleman's dressing room—which is, I suppose, where the leather comes in.” The classic palate traits of Tempranillo are more savory than sweet. There are exuberant fruits, blackberries, black cherries, blueberries and raspberries, plums, leather, and tobacco. Karen MacNeill describes young Tempranillo as a “burst of cherries. After aging, the wine tends to take on a deep, complex earthiness” (73). Young, lightweight Tempranillo meant for early drinking can taste of strawberries and plum jam. Overripe Tempranillo is figgy and sweet and if it has seen long oak aging the flavors can become savory strawberries with a bit of coffee bean and dried fruits. Tempranillo is typically a dry wine and has no residual sugar. It is also usually a full-bodied wine, but it does not sit as heavy as Cabernet Sauvignon. The alcohol is

normally somewhere in the range from 13% to 14.5% (Robinson). The acidity in Tempranillo is medium-minus to medium while the tannin is medium to medium-plus. The finish of a glass of Tempranillo is medium, mild and smooth; the taste will not disappear immediately, but it will stay on the tongue.

Tempranillo does not reflect terroir as clearly as some other grapes do, but because different clones of it are grown in different regions, the grape has adapted. As a result, Tempranillo from different regions has different characteristics. In Rioja, often there is too much Tempranillo planted which can create thick and stewy wines (Robinson). In Rioja Alavesa, most Tempranillos are delicate, scented, firm, dark, and rich. Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero is characterized by intense, deep crimson and good flavor, blackcurrant fruit and savory acid. From Navarra the wine is silky and voluptuous, and from Castilla de la Mancha, Tempranillo can be anything from light pale and fresh to intense and juicy. Red fruits are the dominant flavors in Cataluña. Toro Tempranillo is exuberant, a turbocharged fruity essence of the wine comes out, massively oaky, dark, savory, solid, low in acidity, and high in alcohol. High yields of Tempranillo from Valdepeñas create a wine that does not have much varietal character. Tempranillo from Douro Valley in Portugal can be astringently tannic, but these wines have a heavenly sent, there are ways to emphasize the raspberry and mulberry fruit and floral fragrance. South of the Douro Valley in Portugal, Alentejo Tempranillo is less tannic and acidic but nice juicy, plummy and spicy (Clarke). Still, vinification generally has more of an impact on the wine then does terroir.

Tempranillo typically pairs well with food because of its savory flavors. Really the only foods to avoid pairing with a bottle of Tempranillo are milder fishes because the wine will overpower the fish and foods high in acid, such as sauces with lemon juice or foods that have a lot of vinegar. Tempranillo is not a high acid wine, and the acidity in the food could overpower the wine. The best food to pair with a bottle of Tempranillo is food from Northern Spain such as

pintxos or tapas, jamón ibérico, and chorizo. The savory flavors in the wine means it also goes well with roasted vegetables, casseroles, meat grilled with herbs to highlight the herbal tastes in the wine, and roasted lamb. Tempranillo can also pair nicely with some Indian and Mexican dishes. The best cheese to pair with it is a soft cheese such as ripe brie.

Tempranillo is popular in Spain and worldwide and is continuing to grow in the marketplace. According to a study in 2010, conducted by the University of Adelaide (South Australia), Tempranillo was ranked as the “world’s fourth-most-planted wine grape behind cabernet sauvignon, merlot and... landed in front of such popular grapes as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and pinot noir” (Austin). Not only is it one of the top varietals worldwide, but it makes up 5.05 percent of the wine market and is also considered to be one of the fastest growing varietals in the marketplace (Johanson). One of the contributing factors to this is that it can be grown in different climates and different countries. Some noticeable locations where Tempranillo is popular in the marketplace outside Spain include Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, Argentina, and the United States—particularly the states of California, Oregon, Washington, and Texas (Clarke). In Spain, a major and successful producer in Rioja is Bodegas Ysios and the producer Aalto in Ribera del Duero. In California one major and successful producer is Gallo and another is Abacela in southern Oregon (Robinson).

Since Tempranillo is popular, it is easily and widely available on the market with a range of options in quality and price. Some popular ones are Teso La Monja 2015 Alabaster (Toro) that costs \$220, Valserrano 2014 Finca Monteviejo (Rioja) that costs \$58, and Abacela 2015 Fiesta Tempranillo (Umpqua Valley) that costs \$23 (Wine Enthusiast). Cheaper Tempranillo is considered bulk and good quality wines while the more expensive options represent the premium and high-quality Tempranillo wine niche. Since there is a niche for each buyer, there are many

options to choose from that will pair well with buyers' food and taste preferences as well as their budget.

While not the most widely planted grape in the world, Tempranillo is Spain's most prized and best-loved grape. The grape with many names, as Tempranillo could be called, is grown all over the world, from Europe, Oceania, Africa, to the Americas, but it is primarily grown on the peninsula of its origin, in Spain and Portugal. This red grape is best known for its leading role in the wines of Rioja and the Ribera del Duero and can produce wines with a wide range of aromas and tastes due to the different clones and how it is vinified. Tempranillo, while still not well known in the United States by any of its names, is growing in popularity and is one of the most produced grapes in the world.

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