

# Your Guide to Tempranillo

Here's everything you need to know about Spain's favorite red wine.

By Aliyah Price



Photo by [Mick Stephenson](#)

Tempranillo, pronounced “tem prah NEE yoh”, is the great red grape of Spain. While relatively unknown outside the Iberian Peninsula, Tempranillo can produce some amazing wines, [varietals](#) and [blends](#), with wide ranges of aromas and flavors. Tempranillo is the grape of many names. In almost every different region it is grown, it goes by a [different name](#). Regardless of what it is called, this grape can produce some delicious, complex, quality wines that won't break the bank.



Photo from [Wine Searcher](#)

## What's in a name?

The many names of Tempranillo

- Tinto de Toro in Toro, Spain
- Cencibel in Castilla de la Mancha, Spain
- Ull de Llebre/ Ojo de Liebre in Cataluña, Spain
- Tinto Fino in Ribera del Duero, Spain
- Tinta Roriz in Portugal
- Aragonez in Portugal

## Tempranillo, the Grape:

The Tempranillo grape [originated](#) in Northern Spain, probably in Rioja or Navarra, and has been growing there since the time of the Phoenicians in the 10th century BC. The grape has since spread around the Iberian Peninsula, around the world. The biggest quantity of this grape is grown in Spain in the regions of Rioja, the Ribera del Duero, Toro, and Castilla de la Mancha, and to a lesser extent in Extremadura, Valencia, Cataluña, Madrid, Murcia, and Andalucía. Portugal also grows significant amounts of Tempranillo in the Douro Valley and a bit in Alentejo. Outside Iberia smaller amounts are grown in Herault Aude, Southern France; New South Wales, Australia; Hawke's Bay

New Zealand; Cape Town, South Africa; Willamette Valley, Oregon, USA; Washington, US; Napa, California, USA.

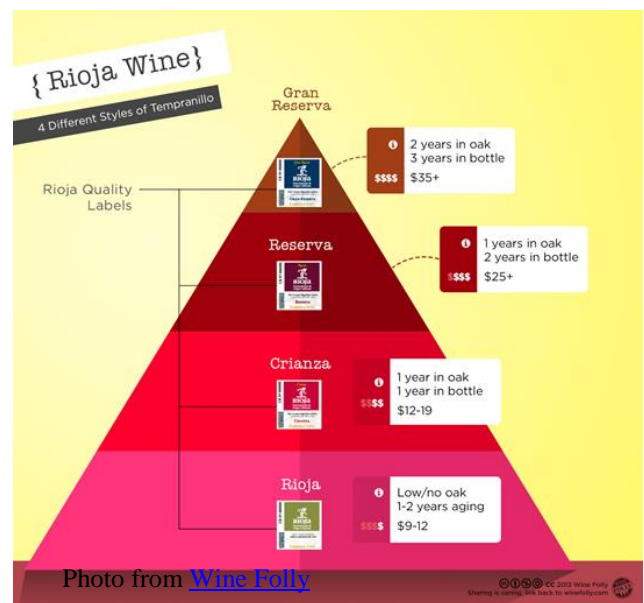
[Tempranillo](#) is a grape of contradictions. It grows best in cool climates, yet some heat is needed for the grapes to get high enough sugar levels. Rioja, the region made famous by its Tempranillo wines, is a region that provides enough heat in a cooler climate. Tempranillo also ripens early (the name *tempranillo* comes from the Spanish word *temprano* meaning early) yet buds late, meaning the vines have a short growing period. In the vineyard, you will typically see Tempranillo growing [en vaso](#), the vines trained to grow as little low bushes, but some may have the vines up a [trellis](#) to increase yields.



In the winery, the vinification process for Tempranillo is pretty standard. Maceration, the process of gaining flavor, color, and tannins from the grape skins, is a little longer for Tempranillo than for some other grapes, and Tempranillo is now typically fermented and aged in French Oak. There are different [aging methods](#) for Tempranillo that will affect the flavor (and price) of the wine.

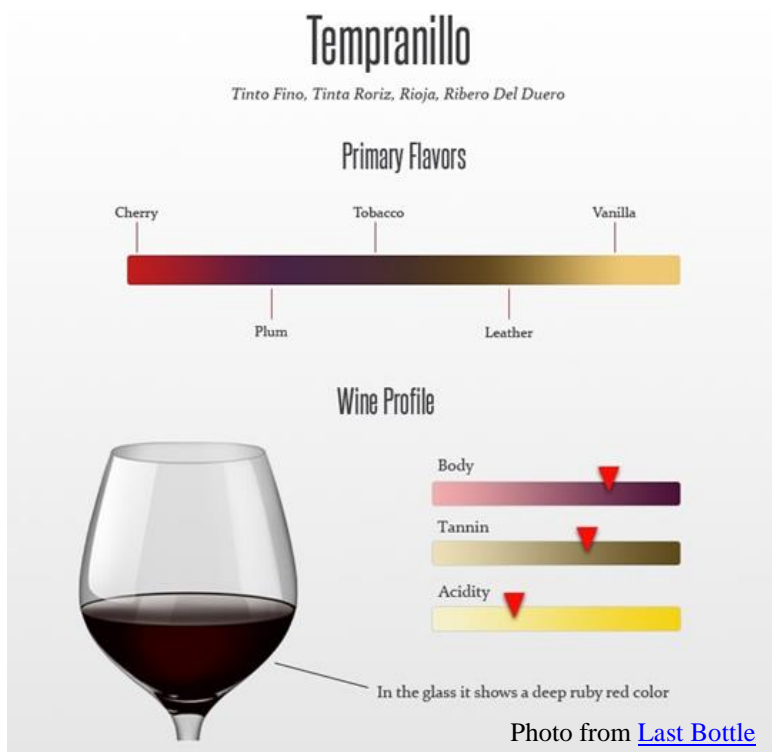
#### Tempranillo Aging

- Standard Rioja: low or no oak, only 1-2 years of aging. Fruitier, taste of strawberries, red cherries, and plum jam
- Crianza: One year aged in oak, one year aged in bottle. Still predominantly red fruit but starting to take on some earthiness
- Reserva: 1 year aged in oak, 2 years in bottle. Good balance of red and dark fruits and earthiness, leather, tobacco
- Gran Reserva: 2 years aged in oak; three years aged in bottle. Much more complex earthy flavors, leather, tobacco, but still some hint of red and dark fruit: dark cherries raspberries, plums



## Tempranillo, the Wine

Tempranillo actually can produce a wide variety of [flavors and aromas](#). Classic Tempranillo can range from a medium ruby to a medium garnet color and is fairly translucent. It has aromas of blackberry, dark cherry, plum, herbs, fresh tobacco leaves and tastes of exuberant fruits, blackberries, and black cherries, blueberries and raspberries, plums, leather, and tobacco. Most Tempranillo wines have a medium to medium plus body, medium to medium plus alcohol, and medium tannins. These wines are heavier than Pinot Noir but lighter than Cabernet Sauvignon. Tempranillo does not reflect [terrior](#) as much as other wines, but where the grapes were grown, does have some impact on the wine.



### Tempranillo Terrior

- Rioja Alavesa, Spain: delicate and scented and firm, dark and rich
- Ribera del Duero, Spain: deep crimson and good flavor, blackcurrant fruit and savory acid
- Castilla de la Mancha, Spain: anything from light pale and fresh to intense and juicy
- Toro, Spain: exuberant, a turbocharged fruity essence, massively oaky, dark, savory, solid, low in acidity, and high in alcohol
- Douro Valley, Portugal: can be astringently tannic but have a heavenly sent— raspberry and mulberry fruit and floral fragrance
- Alentejo, Portugal: less tannin and acidity but nice juicy, plummy and spicy

## Food Pairings:

A bottle of Tempranillo goes [best with food](#) from Northern Spain: pintxos or tapas, jamón ibérico, and chorizo. The savory flavors of the wine mean it will also taste great with roasted vegetables, casseroles, meat grilled with herbs to highlight the herbal tastes in the wine, and roast lamb. Indian and Mexican dishes with a glass of Rioja could also be a stunning combination. For cheese, a soft ripe brie is ideal. Avoid pairing Tempranillo with milder fish and foods high in acid, such as sauces with lemon juice or vinegar.





Photo from [El Sabor de lo Bueno](#)

Tempranillo is a wine you may not have tried or even ever heard of, but it will make a great addition to your wine cellar, collection, or dinner table. Like any wine, a bottle of Tempranillo can get pricey. But unlike many wines, good and even great bottles can fall between the low to middle price range. If you are looking for a new, delicious, red wine to have with dinner that will impress but not break the bank, then Tempranillo is the way to go.

#### Recommended Bottles

- Low Price: Bodegas Flaco Tempranillo Estate Bottled, Vinos de Madrid (\$7)
- Low-Middle Price: Marques de Caceres Rioja Crianza, 2014 (\$11)
- Middle Price: Marques de Riscal Rioja Reserva (\$18)
- Middle-High Price: Vina Alarde Rioja Gran Reserva (\$29)
- High Price: Muga Gran Reserva Prado Enea, 2010 (\$70)

