

English Wine

Sussex is particularly important growing area for English wines. There are many vineyards, and the quality of the wine is very good. Most of the vineyards are open to the public so that the visitor can find out about how wine is produced as well as tasting and purchasing some!

A 2000 year history

It is likely that wine production in England started during the Roman occupation. Before then the native Celts seem to have preferred beer and mead to wine.

When the Romans invaded Britain in AD43 wine drinking became more commonplace. During their digs archaeologists often find remains of drinking vessels from Roman villas and buildings. They have also uncovered deposits of grape vine pollen, suggesting that vineyards were established during the Roman occupation.

When the Romans began to leave at the end of the fourth century, Christianity, became more widespread and wine drinking, playing as it did an important part in Christian ceremonies, became more accepted. Wine growing also became more widespread due to the gradual warming up of the climate.

After the 13th Century the climate began to get wetter, with cooler summers and milder winters, leading to less ripe grapes and more fungal diseases. Coupled with the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 14th Century and cheap imports wine growing went into a gradual decline.

For the next four hundred years up to the First World War, viticulture became very much an occupation for the enthusiast, the eccentric and the adventurous, rather than for the farmer seeking income from his land.

The revival in the industry began after the Second World War. This was due to a combination of new varieties, more suitable growing techniques, better disease control and an acceptance by the public of the style of wines that those varieties produced.

There are now in excess of 400 vineyards in England and Wales.

What's on the label

There are four different categories of still English Wine. You can identify which one of the categories a wine belongs to by reading the label on the bottle.

English Vineyards Quality Wine – made from one of the approved varieties and has passed the Quality Wine Scheme. Roughly a third of wine is classified as Quality Wine.

English Counties Regional Wine – essentially a table wine (like the French Vin de Pays), but has passed the Regional Wine Scheme and does not have to bear the 'Table Wine' label.



Over 90% of English wine is white wine. This is mainly from Germanic vines.

Typically it has a floral bouquet, and is high in acids and fruity flavours.

This style is distinct from that of any other wine producing country.

English Table Wine – made from one of the approved varieties but is not a Regional Wine or a Quality Wine.

UK Table Wine - made from UK grown grapes where the grape variety used is not an approved one.



Success of English Sparkling wine

English sparkling wine, most of it made by the proper Champagne method, has a very good reputation. One theory is that this is because much of southern England is in the same chalk basin as Champagne. There is similar soil, climate and with increasingly good winemakers English Sparkling Wine can give Champagne a very good run for its money.

Some English wines have actually beaten great French champagnes in blind tastings!

Vineyards in Sussex

The English Wine Centre

The English Wine Centre was established in 1972 to provide visitors with the opportunity to taste a range of English wine from different vineyards and winemakers. Set in the Cuckmere Valley between Eastbourne and Lewes the Centre houses the English Wine Museum as well as an extensive wine tasting and shop area.

Alfriston Roundabout, East Sussex BN26 5QS, Tel: 01323 870164

Vineyards in Sussex – ring for more information

Arundel Vineyards – The Vineyard, Church Lane, Lyminster, West Sussex.
A vineyard trail, collection of agricultural equipment and picnic area plus wine tasting in a fifteenth-century Sussex Barn.
Tel: (01903) 883393, Tue-Thu plus Sat, Sun and bank holiday Mon, Apr–Oct.

Barkham Manor Vineyards - Piltdown, Uckfield, East Sussex.
Guided tours, vineyard trail, shop, and picnic area are available.
Tel: (01825) 722103, Daily Apr-Sep.

Barnsgate Manor Vineyard - Herons Ghyll, Uckfield, East Sussex.
Vineyard walks, donkeys, llamas, tea room and restaurant as well as a gift shop where the Barnsgate wines can be tasted and purchased.
Tel: (01825) 713366, Daily 10.00-17.00 or dusk if earlier.

Bookers Vineyard - Foxhole Lane, Bolney, East Sussex.
A vineyard trail takes you through 5 acres (2 hectares) of countryside. Guided tours can also be arranged.
Tel: (01444) 881575, Tue-Sun.

Breaky Bottom Vineyard - Rodmell, Lewes, East Sussex.
Specialising in French-style wines, this vineyard is situated in the beautiful Ouse Valley.
Tel: (01273) 476427, Daily.

Carr Taylor Vineyards - Yew Tree Farm, Wheel Lane, Westfield, Nr Hastings, East Sussex.

Bubbly, hampers, wines, gifts, preserves, teas, coffees, cakes and more are available at the shop.

Tel: (01424) 752501, Daily 10.00-17.00.

Davenport Vineyards - Limney Farm, Castle Hill, Rotherfield, East Sussex.

Produces dry whites, sparkling wine and red wine.

Tel: (01892) 852380.

Hidden Spring Vineyard & Orchard - Vines Cross Road, Horam, East Sussex.

A wine trail takes you across 9 acres (3.6 hectares) of vines. Guided tour available on request.

Tel: (01435) 812640, Daily.

Leeford Vineyards - Whatlington, Battle, East Sussex.

Lurgashall Winery - Windfallwood, Dial Green, Nr Petworth, West Sussex.

The Winery, housed in converted 17th and 19th century farm buildings nestles beneath Blackdown, the highest point in West Sussex. Wine Shop has a selection of food, cider, glasses, honey, mead mustard, fudge, chocolates and of course wine for sale.

Tel: (01428) 707292, Daily Mon-Sat 9.00-17.00, Sun 11.00-17.00, except 25-26 Dec and 1 Jan.

Nyetimber Vineyard - An award winning vineyard amidst lakes, llamas and a visitor centre housed in an historic windmill.

Gay Street, Nr Pulborough, West Sussex.

Tel: (01798) 815196, Daily May-Oct 14.00-17.00 (opens 11.00 Sat-Sun).

Sedlescombe Vineyard - Cripps Corner, Sedlescombe, Nr Robertsbridge, East Sussex.

Established in 1979, you are able to sample wines, bubbly organic fruit juices, ciders, picnic amongst the vines and browse their range of crafts, wholefoods and organic wines.

Tel: (01580) 830715, Daily 10.00-18.00.

St George's Vineyard - Cross Farm, Waldron, Nr Heathfield, East Sussex.

Adopt a wine and receive a bottle with your own label. Stroll around the vines, visit the winery, or eat and shop in a seventeenth-century barn.

Tel: (01435) 812156, weekends only Mar; Tue-Sun Apr-June and Sep-Oct; daily July, Aug and Dec.