



Deutsches Weininstitut GmbH
Pressestelle
Platz des Weines 2 • 55294 Bodenheim
Ernst Büscher
Telefon 06135 9323-156
ernst.buescher@deutscheweine.de
www.deutscheweine.de

29.11.2023

Pressemitteilung

Turbo-Harvest with Good Quality - Vintage 2023 in the German Winegrowing Regions

The 2023 wine year will go down in history as one of the fastest harvests on record.

Capricious weather brought extreme drought, which was followed by weeks of heavy rainfall that culminated in an extremely warm late summer. Moreover, most grape varieties ripened almost simultaneously. With September temperatures of up to 30 degrees, the winegrowers collected their grapes in the cool night and morning hours so that the must did not end up overheated in the vats.

The main challenge of the year was to bring in healthy grapes. In many places, diligent pre-selection was done in the vineyards, which on the one hand reduced the quantities, but on the other hand also ensured a good to exceptional quality overall. In addition to Riesling and Silvaner, the winners of the vintage also include the international red wine varieties and the new fungus-resistant grape varieties, which were able to demonstrate their high resistance to fungal pathogens particularly well this year. The first young wines of 2023 are already very fruit-driven, pleasantly lean, and with a fine acidity.

The yields this year varied widely depending on the grape variety and rainfall distribution, both regionally and across individual sites. At an estimated 8.8 million hectolitres, the nationwide harvest volume is on a par with the long-term average and three per cent below the previous year's result.

The German Wine Institute (DWI) found out how the 2023 vintage developed in the 13 wine-growing regions.

Ahr (529 hectares): Dream vintage with superb Pinot Noirs

The winegrowers in the Ahr region are overjoyed this year: "We are completely satisfied," says Winegrowers' Association President Hubert Pauly. The weather, water and wine quality have provided the Ahr winegrowers with perfect conditions. While other winegrowing regions had to contend with too much water and moisture, the Ahr was deeply thankful: "We always had the right water supply at the right time."

This began in spring: After a mild start to the year, the Ahr saw repeated rainfall, even in the otherwise dry early summer, which provided the vines with sufficient water for practically the entire season.

The abundant rainfall from the end of July and in August led to high selection pressure along the Ahr. However, as hand-picking is the predominant harvesting method here anyway, the winegrowers were able to counteract this threat very well with an early selection of healthy grapes. Although this meant a great deal of effort, particularly on the steep slopes, it was rewarded with outstanding quality.

Similar to autumn 2022, this year's grape harvest on the Ahr also started at the beginning of September, two weeks ahead of the long-term average. Because it was dry and warm on the Ahr at this time, the winegrowers also harvested very good quality Rivaner, Dornfelder and Frühburgunder grapes.

The Ahr's leading grape variety, Spätburgunder a.k.a. Pinot Noir, benefited from the mostly sunny Indian summer weather at the end of September, which resulted in daily increases in must weights on days that were not too hot. "The 2023 Pinot Noir will be powerful, full-bodied and expressive," is how the winegrowing president characterises the new vintage.

At an estimated 39,000 hectolitres, the harvest volume is slightly above the ten-year average, although yields vary greatly from one vineyard to the next. Producers in the Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler region suffered major losses of up to 30 per cent following hail damage in early summer.

Riesling is also a big winner this year on the Ahr. Some wineries say that the quality is better than it has been for 20 years, even including Auslese wines. "We urgently needed a good wine year," says Pauly. After all, the Ahr is still struggling with the damage from the flood disaster of 2021. According to Pauly, only 480 hectares of the official 529 hectares of vineyards are still in production.

Baden (15,727 hectares): A promising, fruit-driven vintage

"From Baden's perspective, the wine year got off to a very good start in spring," reports Holger Klein, Managing Director of the Baden Winegrowers' Association. Around 6 to 8 June, when the vines blossomed, there were ideal temperatures and enough water for a promising vintage to ripen. This was followed by a fairly long period of fine weather and drought, during which the water levels dropped so much that young vines had to be irrigated. "We had very stable weather conditions until mid-July and the grapes were able to develop well despite the drought," says Klein.

Then, at the end of July, the long-awaited rain set in. This ensured a sufficient water supply for the vines at exactly the right time. However, there were also some localised heavy rainfall events. In the Markgräflerland region, more than 1000 hectares of vines were affected by hail damage on 24 July and 24 August.

The prolonged rain caused the berries to burst open in some places, which in Baden particularly affected the Pinot grapes that are so important in the region. "We had to act quickly," says Klein. A selective and rapid harvest ensured a labour-intensive start to autumn. The situation calmed down at the end of September and the late-ripening varieties could be harvested under ideal weather conditions. The winners here were therefore also late varieties such as Riesling, but also Gutedel (Chasselas) in Markgräflerland.

"The 2023 wines from Baden will be very fruit-driven because we had cool night-time temperatures in September and October," says Klein happily. The nutrient supply is good, the alcohol content is not too high, and the acidity is moderate by Baden standards. The harvest volume in Baden will probably be at the upper end of the long-term average. The yield is expected to be around 1.2 million hectolitres.

"Anyone who did a good job in the vineyard throughout the year can be very satisfied with the vintage," is the conclusion. In particular, winegrowers who focussed their vineyards on moderate yields and took plant protection, quality-enhancing and yield-regulating measures at the right time were rewarded for their efforts this year.

Franken (6,171 hectares): Aromatic and elegant wines from Franconia

2023 was also a wine year of extremes in Franken, but it was a wine year with a happy ending: "Wine connoisseurs can expect wonderful wines from Franconia this year, the home of Silvaner since 1659," says Winegrowers' Association President Artur Steinmann joyfully. Silvaner, the leading grape variety, especially proved to be a match for the changing climate and produced fabulous wines.

The start to the 2023 wine year in Franken was rather subdued. An excessively warm, cloudy winter was followed by a cool, rainy spring. "With well-moistened soils, the Franconian vineyards got off to a hesitant start to the season," reports the Franconian Winegrowers' Association. However, even if growth was initially restrained, the budding was promising - thanks to the rise in temperatures in June, flowering took place optimally in just a few days. However, some thunderstorms shortly before flowering caused isolated regional damage due to hail and heavy rain.

The dry phase from mid-May to mid-July then resulted in drought stress, especially in young vineyards, while the older vineyards came through this period very well. July brought a long period of heat with highs of just under 40 degrees Celsius and at times strongly fluctuating day and night temperatures. In some cases, the temperature difference was 27 degrees Celsius within a few days.

The onset of rain at the end of July initially led to a relief in the water shortage and rapid ripening, but ultimately also to mildew and the threat of rot. The result was "in many places the fastest harvest ever, also because estate wines and single-vineyard wines ripened practically simultaneously", according to the Franken VDP (Association of Prädikat Wine Estates). In some places in Franconia, it took just 14 days for the main harvest to be completed.

The summery weather during the harvest enabled the winegrowers to harvest healthy and ripe grapes. This created the best conditions for elegant variety-typical wines in the 2023 vintage, reports Winegrowers' President Artur Steinmann: 2023 will be a year of Franconian wines full of flavour and elegance. At an estimated 78 hectolitres per hectare, the harvest volume is slightly above the long-term average. A total of around 468,000 hectolitres are expected to be harvested in Franken.

Hessische Bergstrasse (462 hectares): Wet summer, golden autumn

The 2023 wine year on the Hessische Bergstrasse could be summarised as challenging with capricious weather. "The hot summer created different expectations, but these were not fulfilled," says Charlotte Freiburger from the Hessische Bergstrasse Winegrowers' Association, who is a winegrower herself. Everything looked very good until mid-July, then came the long-awaited rain, which ultimately brought too much of a good thing.

The wine year had started so well in Germany's smallest winegrowing region: The Hessische Bergstrasse was spared storms and hailstorms, and the long summer period in May and June raised hopes of an excellent vintage as the grapes ripened. But things turned out differently: "The heavy rainfall from July onwards filled the grapes with water and some of the berries burst open. Mildew was also a major issue during the summer period," explains Freiburger. All in all, this led to losses and a lot of extra work.

In autumn, a very careful grape harvest was required. Every vineyard had to be pre-selected, or even completely hand-picked. The amount of work was exceptionally high. Due to the strong selection, the quantities in some vineyards on the Hessische Bergstrasse were reduced by a third to a half.

The must weights also did not develop as hoped due to the high rainfall. "We were brought down to earth again this year," says the winegrower. Nevertheless, the winegrowers on the Bergstrasse are quite satisfied with the quality and harvest quantities. Despite everything, 2023 will be another fine vintage. Somewhat lighter wines in the lower alcohol range are to be expected. "The wines will be nice and fresh and will certainly develop a nice fruitiness," summarises Freiburger. In terms of volume, the estimated must harvest of 32,000 hectolitres is at the same level as last year and slightly above the long-term average.

Mittelrhein (466 hectares): Heat, manual harvest and high must weights

"I have rarely experienced an autumn where we worked in T-shirts from morning to night," says Heinz-Uwe Fetz, President of the Mittelrhein winegrowing region. The small winegrowing region with its steep vineyards experienced weather turbulence like no other: Heat, elaborate manual harvesting and the highest must weights - the 2023 wine year brought all of this to the winegrowers in the Middle Rhine Valley.

The year began rather unremarkably and everything looked very good until the beginning of September. The only concerns in spring were long early morning dew phases, which formed a basis for oidium (powdery mildew) in some vineyards.

In July and August, the Middle Rhine was not spared the heavy rainfall. The rainfall came at a stage of development when the skins were soft and the Oechsle values were high. As a result, some berries burst open, requiring a rapid response and extensive selection. However, the warm temperatures of up to 30 degrees in September and October made the grapes very ripe and sweet. "Because of the heat, the grapes also arrived at the wineries very warm, so the cooling in the cellar had to run day and night," reports Fetz. Technically well-equipped wineries were definitely at an advantage.

The warm autumn also accelerated the grape harvest immensely. It started in the Middle Rhine region on 12 September and was completed just four weeks later, even the Riesling had been harvested - some winegrowers speak of a turbo harvest. Nevertheless, the expected yields are good. With an estimated total harvest of 29,000 hectolitres of must, the 2023 vintage is slightly above the average of previous years in terms of volume.

"While Pinot has often been the beneficiary in recent years, this year it is Riesling," summarises the Winegrowers' President. This year, there are many Beerenauslese and noble sweet wines, especially from the king of white wines, as the heat in September drove the Oechsle levels to record highs. In contrast, there will be fewer red wines from the Middle Rhine, which suffered from a high incidence of the Asian fruit fly (*Drosophila suzukii*) – however, red varieties only make up 16 per cent of the area under cultivation in the Mittelrhein region.

Mosel (8,575 hectares): Riesling plays to its strengths

Turbo harvest with Riesling as the champion - that's the concise harvest summary for the Mosel. "2023 was a year for the Mosel," says Henning Seibert, Chairman of Moselwein e.V., that proved that Riesling copes very well with extremes. This year, the range of yields and qualities is again very wide, with the results varying greatly depending on the location, water supply and grape variety.

Even the winter months at the beginning of 2023 were significantly warmer in Winningen than the long-term average, with January experiencing average temperatures of 5.6 degrees Celsius. Bud burst took place there on 25 April. May and June were characterised by predominantly dry and warm weather, which promoted the growth of the vines. Flowering began around 8 June - slightly later than in 2022, but still well ahead of the long-term average.

The dry and hot June then brought drought stress, especially for younger vines, and in July there were also problems with sunburn before the weather changed: From the end of July, heavy rain also fell on the Mosel, which suddenly filled the grapes. This was followed by very warm nights in September, which barely allowed for any cooling. As a result, the grapes ripened very quickly in some cases: "Normally, we see an increase of one degree Oechsle per day," emphasises Seibert, "now we've had days of 3 to 4 degrees Oechsle increase per day - we've never had that before."

More than 50 per cent of the grapes were picked late in the harvest. "The Riesling is definitely characterised by fruit, but we also have an ideal ratio of acidity to sweetness" enthuses Seibert. In the case of Riesling, the onset of noble rot also offered the opportunity to produce top-quality noble sweet wines. This is where the grape variety clearly showed its strengths this year. In contrast, it was not an easy vintage for Pinots or the red varieties where more selection work was required.

Due to this thorough selection, the harvest volume on the Mosel was also lower than initially forecast. The association is expecting a slightly below-average 710,000 hectolitres of must, 650,000 hectolitres of which will come from white varieties.

Nahe (4,240 hectares): Turbo-charged autumn with outstanding quality

"The work was worth it," is the relieved conclusion on the Nahe after a turbulent year. "It was a fast, exhausting year," says Harald Sperling from the Nahe Winegrowers' Association.

Yet everything had started so well: A wet winter was followed by a rather cool spring, which brought much-needed rain. As a result, the vegetation started a little later than normal, but warm and dry weather arrived for the blossoming of the vines, which ensured good fruit set, especially in June, and rapid berry development immediately afterwards.

After the good flowering and the favourable development of the grapes, everyone involved expected an above-average harvest yield. Things looked really good in the vineyards until the beginning of August. But then the rain came and brought large quantities in some areas, although the distribution varied greatly.

The further development of the grapes was correspondingly varied, as not all of them coped well with the abundance of water. In some places, Dornfelder, Müller-Thurgau and Silvaner grapes failed, while in other vineyards the yields were above average. For the Nahe winegrowers, the autumn brought high selection pressure and a lot of manual work, but on the other hand also excellent qualities.

"The Riesling in particular was just right in the end," reports Sperling. This was because the weather calmed down for the harvest of the late grape varieties, with warm and dry days being offset by lower night-time temperatures. Thanks to cool night-time temperatures, a "night harvest" as often occurs in Rheinhessen was generally not necessary on the Nahe. Only a few winegrowers started in the early hours of the morning.

The Nahe winegrowers can look back on a turbulent year in terms of labour intensity, especially for the short time in which it was needed. In some areas, the harvest was one of the fastest autumn operations in history. But it was worth it: "We have a very decent yield level with excellent qualities," says Sperling happily: at around 345,000 hectolitres, the volume on the Nahe is estimated to be around six per cent higher than in 2022 and even around eight per cent higher than the long-term average.

Pfalz (23,698 hectares): Careful grape harvest was rewarded

In the Pfalz, turbulent weather presented the winemakers with major challenges. However, those who had done good preparatory work throughout the wine year harvested healthy, ripe grapes in the autumn, which promised wine of a high quality.

Looking back, the year began quite favourably in the Palatinate. The mild winter did not cause any frost damage and, in contrast to neighbouring Rheinhessen, there was no hail damage. An optimal flowering period for Riesling, which began on 8 June, was followed by an initially optimal year for the vines, with a sunny dry period in June before the onset of a warm and humid phase with plenty of rain at the end of July. This resulted in very compact grapes, especially for the Pinot varieties.

"Thanks to the sufficiently long vegetation period without extreme drought, a vintage with pronounced fruit is expected," comes the verdict from the Pfalz.

Here, too, the winner is Riesling: winegrowers are expecting top quality from this late-ripening grape variety. The picture for Pinot varieties, on the other hand, is mixed. Dornfelder and Portugieser also had to be harvested early due to the threat of excessive losses caused by the Asian fruit fly (*Drosophila suzukii*) and pressure from high mildew infection.

Because many grape varieties ripened almost simultaneously, "this presented the wineries with a wide range of logistical challenges," reports Jürgen Oberhofer from the Institute of Viticulture & Oenology at the DLR Rheinpfalz in Neustadt. Added to this were the sometimes high temperatures in September, all of which could only be overcome through a high level of personal commitment and extremely precise work when harvesting and processing the grapes.

The yield in the Pfalz will be in line with the average in 2023. The harvest volume is estimated at 2.25 million hectolitres, which would be around two per cent less than in the previous year but roughly correspond to the long-term average harvest volume. The "speedy autumn" will be remembered as the grapes were already picked around four weeks after the start of the main harvest. This intensive harvest brought very good quality in many places.

Rheingau (3,200 hectares): A year for Riesling

"Riesling is clearly the winner this year," says Rheingau Winegrowers' Association President Peter Seyffardt. The Pinot varieties in particular suffered from the heavy rainfall in July and August. The winegrowers had to be very selective in order to harvest healthy grapes. Over 200 litres of rain fell in July and August, which also had positive effects. The steep slopes along the Rhine especially benefited from the sufficient water supply.

"The Rudesheim and Lorch vineyards in particular harvested a very special vintage," says a delighted Seyffardt. Also, throughout the Rheingau where Riesling dominates, the grapes remained very healthy until the end, especially in the higher vineyards, so that excellent quality could be harvested, sometimes in small quantities. The total yield for the Rheingau is estimated at 228,000 hectolitres of must, which would correspond to an increase of six percent compared to the long-term average.

The harvest was an intensive time for the Rheingau winegrowers with a lot of manual work: "We harvested quickly, and a lot of pre-selection had to be done, especially with the Pinot varieties," says Seyffardt: "One colleague even claimed it was the most exhausting autumn of his life." In many places, the grape harvest was already complete by mid-October - earlier than ever before.

Overall, the wine year started fairly calmly in the Rheingau. The situation was also easy in terms of plant protection, with only a relatively large amount of cooling technology required during the grape harvest. This was due to the hot days in September when the musts arrived at the processing stations at very high temperatures. The wineries generally began harvesting early in the morning or during the night.

The young wines are already aromatic and fruity with harmonious acidity due to a very good ripeness/acidity ratio. Thanks to the golden autumn with cool nights at the end, there are also very fine noble sweet wines in the Rheingau this year. "It was clearly a year for Riesling," said the Winegrowers' President.

Rheinhessen (27,312 hectares): Mastery ensures good quality

Turbo autumn and temperatures of up to 30 degrees during the grape harvest - the winegrowers in Germany's largest winegrowing region, Rheinhessen, really worked up a sweat this year. Many winegrowers celebrated "Harvest Thanksgiving" at the end of September, while in some wineries the last batches were harvested in the first few days of October. The reason for the turbo autumn was partly due to the very warm day and night temperatures in September.

"You simply can't pick grapes at temperatures of over 30°C in the afternoon," reports winegrower Stefan Braunewell, Chairman of the Rheinhessenwein e.V. regional wine promotion organisation. Therefore, harvesting often took place in the early hours of the morning, while the grapes were still fresh and cool. "Unfortunately, we had to disturb many people's sleep well before dawn," says Braunewell, apologising to his colleagues: "Our fellow townsfolk were very understanding."

In Rheinhessen, too, the wine year got off to a very relaxed start. After a dry, sunny early summer with optimal flowering, the rainfall in July and August initially ensured a good water supply to the soil. The size of the berries also increased, but this was then offset by the warm September temperatures, reports Jens Göhring, President of the Rheinhessen Winegrowers' Association.

However, abundant rainfall combined with unusual summer temperatures made it necessary to react quickly in autumn. Regional hailstorms in the Wonnegau region and an increasing risk of spoilage due to the capricious weather accelerated the harvest immensely, especially because many grape varieties were ready to be picked at the same time.

"However, our winegrowers responded masterfully to the challenges of autumn with their professional technical equipment and skilled expertise," emphasises Göhring. Good cooling technology in September was crucial for quality management in order to be able to control the course of fermentation for an optimum flavour yield. The summary stated: A "good quality vintage with balanced must weights and stable acidity values" was harvested.

The harvest quantities varied greatly depending on the sub-region and winery. "Due to the rigorous selection, some harvest volumes were significantly reduced, even by up to 50 per cent," says Göhring. The total yield of the growing region is estimated to be slightly below the long-term average of around 2.5 million hectolitres.

Saale-Unstrut (847 hectares): Strong red wines, variety-typical white wines

"We are very satisfied with the vintage," says Saale-Unstrut's Winegrowers' Association President, Hans Albrecht Zieger. In contrast to the growing regions in the south-west, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia benefited from an exception: "We only had moderate rainfall in August," reports Zieger. This was followed by a long, hot summer and a dry late summer in September, which gave the winegrowers above-average must weights.

The winegrowers on the Saale and Unstrut were not spared the capricious weather: a mild and excessively dry winter was followed by persistent rainfall in March, "which was very important for the start of vegetation", according to the winegrowers' association. Spring was rather cool and damp compared to previous years, so bud burst did not begin until early May and extended over a longer period of time.

June finally brought sunshine and warm temperatures, ideal for the somewhat delayed but very successful flowering of the vines. However, the persistently hot and humid weather then led to high infection pressure from powdery mildew.

In summer, the Saale and Unstrut rivers were far too dry. "The growing region had hardly any rainfall for over six weeks," says Zieger. July then brought relief with a longer period of rain and allowed the vineyards to grow explosively. There were also isolated cases of rot, but not to the same extent as in other regions. Müller-Thurgau, Bacchus and Portugieser in particular had to be harvested quickly.

In August, however, winegrowers were able to breathe a sigh of relief: the rain clouds lifted, followed by a warm and dry late summer, which allowed the main harvest to begin as early as 11 September. "The consistently sunny weather ensured good sugar accumulation and slow fruit acid degradation in the grapes," according to the harvest report. The hot, dry weather once again brought an enormous surge in ripening with above-average must weights.

Zieger estimates that the harvest volume of around 50,000 hectolitres will be around six percent below the previous year. The decline is due to the drought in early summer. Zieger expects strong, variety-typical wines in the white wine segment and full-bodied, deep-coloured red wines - especially Pinot and Blauer Zweigelt.

Sachsen (507 hectares): Top quality after an exciting autumn

In the winegrowing region of Sachsen, the autumn was one of great satisfaction: "From the second week of September, the weather was like a flick of a switch - it was dry, warm and stable right into October," reports Sachsen Winegrowers' Association President Felix Hößelbarth: "That was the game changer."

Saxony's winegrowers had experienced weather turbulence like rarely before: "There were times in May and June when it was far too dry and then wet phases that lasted far too long," reports Hößelbarth. In August, over 100 litres per square metre fell until the first week of September. Problems caused by bursting berries or powdery mildew were, however, well under control. Grape varieties with a loose grape structure, such as Müller-Thurgau or some Pinot Blancs, benefited from the weather, while compact varieties such as Pinot Gris or Riesling tended to have problems.

But then came the second week of September, and the weather changed abruptly: it remained unusually hot into October, even at night. Now we had to hurry. "It was a relatively quick harvest because it was warm and sunny every day, and the must weights increased very quickly," says the Winegrowers' President. The entire harvest was brought in within five to six weeks. As the nights also remained warm with temperatures of around 20°C, some of the grapes were brought in at 25 to 30 degrees. Producers that were able to harvest mechanically at night or in the early hours of the morning had an advantage. Those with labour-intensive steep slopes that can only be harvested by hand had a harder time.

However, the quality of the wines was excellent: "Well matured, good quantities, good flavour," reports Hößelbarth with satisfaction: "We expect ten percent more volume than last year. That would put the Sachsen growing region at around 28,500 hectolitres."

Württemberg (11,407 hectares): Quality in the glass after turbo harvest

The winegrowers in Württemberg also had to be quick to react in the 2023 wine year: "The harvest was hectic and compressed," says Hermann Morast, Managing Director of the Württemberg Winegrowers' Association: "We had a good winegrowing year, but the rain then threw a lot of things out of kilter." The main harvest in Württemberg lasted only three weeks, yet at the end of the turbocharged effort there were satisfied faces: the warm and sunny late summer brought great qualities to the glass.

The 2023 cultivation year was also exceptional and challenging in Württemberg, reports Roman Glaser, President of the Baden-Württemberg Cooperatives' Association. The hot and dry summer was one of the five warmest in over 120 years. The vines sprouted somewhat later in spring than the long-term average, but then continued to develop rapidly with optimal growing weather.

During flowering, it remained predominantly dry and warm, so that full flowering was completed in most vineyards within a few days - with optimal fruit set. However, the early summer was so dry that irrigation was necessary, especially in young vineyards and on dry sites. The Württemberg winegrowers were not spared the extensive rainfall in late summer. They had to react quickly due to bursting grapes and the risk of mildew.

Morast speaks of a "turbo harvest", with a clear winner, Riesling, the main grape variety in Württemberg. The winemakers report fine fruity and aromatic Rieslings with a moderate alcohol content that consumers can look forward to.

The traditional Swabian grape variety Trollinger had a harder time this year: Asian fruit fly (*Drosophila suzukii*) caused major damage, which led to reduced yields. At 930,000 hectolitres, the estimated harvest volume for the growing region is six per cent below the previous year's level and thus falls well short of initial expectations.