

# SIMPLE TASTING GUIDE

See → Smell → Taste → Assess

## SEE

**COLOR** You can see color best when holding your glass at an angle, over a white background, in a well-lit space!

### WHITE WINE:



WATER  
/CLEAR



PALE  
/STRAW



YELLOW  
/LEMON



GOLD  
/TAWNY

### RED WINE:



GARNET



RUBY



PURPLE

- If a white wine is more yellow or gold it usually means it has seen oak, is aged (oxidized), or the grapes were picked late
- Pale white wines are typically more youthful (or meant to be consumed early)

- Most red wines are ruby in color
- Older red wines are typically more garnet (orange/brown) in color due to oxidation
- Thin skinned varieties (like Pinot Noir and Gamay) will oxidize and turn garnet quicker than thick skinned varieties (like Syrah and Malbec)
- Thick skinned varieties usually have more anthocyanins (color compounds) and are typically more purple

## CONCENTRATION

### RED WINE:



PALE



MED



DEEP

- Thick-skinned varieties are generally deeper in concentration (you can't see through them) and they usually "stain" the glass
- Thin-skinned varieties are more pale in concentration (you can see through them)

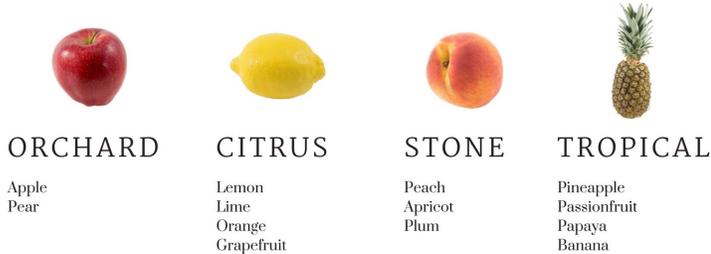
\*\*\*Sometimes winemakers use additives to make a wine darker (to appeal to the consumer). One of these is called Mega Purple and used in many bulk wines you see at grocery stores

# SMELL + TASTE

SWIRL your wine! You see people do this often and it's actually important. Swirling takes the aromas and lifts them to the surface of the wine. It makes them more available to your nose. Fruit aromas are the easiest to identify!

**FRUIT** There are SO many fruits out there, so it sometimes helps to think about fruit CAMPS instead of pinpointing specifics

## WHITE WINE:



## RED WINE:

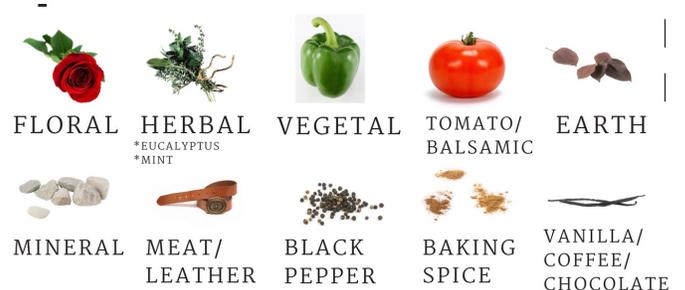


## NON-FRUIT

### WHITE WINE:



### RED WINE:



### Understanding these different aromas and flavors:

- **FLORAL (R+W):** For white wines, any yellow/white flowers; For red wines, red or purple flowers
- **HERBAL (R+W):** Any fresh or dried herbs (basil, tarragon, oregano, mint); This category can also include black tea or licorice
- **VEGETAL (R+W):** Can be any vegetable, but a MAJOR one is green bell pepper which is a common tasting note found in the Bordeaux Varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and even Sauvignon Blanc)
- **EARTH (R+W):** Think of the woods here! Dirt, wet leaves, mushrooms, etc.
- **MINERAL (R+W):** It is a common thought that grape aromas can be influenced by the soil! For whites this can smell like wet rocks (think of the smell of rain on a stony surface), for reds it can smell like graphite (pencil shavings) or even smoke
- **SPICE (R+W):** Most spice flavors and aromas are influenced by oak, like baking spices (cinnamon/nutmeg) but can sometimes be specific to the variety (black pepper is common for Syrah)
- **HONEY (W):** A sweet aroma that usually applies to white wines where the grapes have been picked late (Riesling is a common example)
- **BREAD (W):** A bread or toast aroma that comes from the yeasts that remain in contact with the wine after fermentation (you will often smell this in Champagne, but it's common in other white wines)
- **BUTTER (W):** This aroma is from a compound called diacetyl (created during winemaking) and is the same compound used in movie theater buttered popcorn
- **VANILLA/CARAMEL (W):** These rich aromas and flavors are usually influenced by oak in white wines
- **CHOCOLATE/COFFEE (R):** These rich aromas and flavors are usually influenced by oak in red wines
- **TOMATO/BALSAMIC (R):** A tangy aroma and flavor that is found in many Italian red wines

# TASTE

## SWEET vs DRY

SWEET and FRUITY are two different things, and are often confused! Sometimes a wine has really RIPE flavors and comes off as SWEET, but SWEET wines are wines with residual sugar left over after fermentation. Think of sweet more like a texture, or a feeling, rather than a flavor. (Sweet wines typically have a "weighted" richness or heaviness.)

## STRUCTURE

The structural or textural elements are what give a wine its "backbone" and create BALANCE! When a wine is too high or too low in the following elements, it will throw off the entire composition, and sometimes make the wine "undrinkable".

All of these components can be measured on a scale from low to high.

### ACID

- You can judge acidity based on whether your mouth waters after you take a sip of something. The more you salivate, the higher the acid. (Sometimes a lot of citrus notes can make you think a wine has more acid than it does, so when judging acidity, pay attention to how much you salivate!)

### BODY



- The best comparison I've seen for this is the milk comparison: Light bodied wines have the consistency of WATER (light on the palate, goes down easy). Full bodied wines have the consistency of 2% MILK (heavy on the palate/coats the mouth). Somewhere in the middle is medium bodied wines which have the consistency of SKIM MILK.

### ALCOHOL

- Sometimes you can smell alcohol, but you can also feel alcohol 'burn' the back of your throat when you take a sip. More burn = higher alcohol. Alcohol is always listed on the bottle.

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
10% or less	12.5% - 13.5%	14.5% or more

### TANNIN (RED WINE)

- Tannins are compounds from the skins and seeds of red wine and leave a bitter/astringent feeling on your palate. They dry out your mouth and make your tongue feel "grippy".
- Tannin is also found in tea and dark chocolate.

# ASSESS

Is the wine balanced? What elements are most prominent? Does it taste good to you?

- Quality wine** = A wine that is balanced in every way for the specific variety but also made with good intentions (respect for the variety, the land, and without too many undesirable additives). It doesn't necessarily have to be expensive, but quality wine won't be dirt cheap!
- Good wine** = A wine that tastes good to you! Whether or not a wine is "good" is completely subjective. If it tastes good to you, you should keep drinking it!