

What Makes Wine Kosher?

Ask the Expert: Kosher Wine and Kosher Mevushal Wine by My Jewish Learning

In order for wine to be kosher, of course, it has to contain only kosher ingredients. And according to traditional Jewish law, once the grapes are picked and brought to be crushed, only Shabbat-observant Jews can be involved in making the wine. From crushing to bottling, kosher wine must be handled exclusively by observant Jews.

Why the strict rules about only Jews? Because in the past wine was often used by pagans in their offerings to idol gods. When something good happened, you'd pour some wine out on the ground as a symbolic thank you (if you were an idol worshipper, that is). The rabbis who set up the rules for kosher wine wanted to make sure that Jews never got a glass of wine that had been associated with an idolatrous offering, so they required that only Jews be involved in handling kosher wine.

Uncorking the Secrets of Kosher Wine by OU's Kosher Staff

The kosher supervision of wine and grape juice is one of the most complicated areas of kosher food production because wine cannot be handled by a non-Jew, in order to prevent the wine from becoming *yayin nesech* (wine that had been used in a libation in a pagan ceremony). The rabbis went even further and prohibited any wine handled by non-Jews; this prohibition is known as *stam yaynam* and was designed to prevent intermarriage. Thus, throughout the winemaking process, a non-Jew cannot operate any machinery, open or shut any valves or start or stop any pumps. Wine that is *mevushal* [cooked, or in most cases, flash-pasteurized] can be handled by non-Jews since it is no longer fit for sacramental use, or in Talmudic terms, it is not *ra'oyi lemizbayach*.

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 123:1

The Shulchan Aruch is the Code of Jewish Law. (Yoreh De'ah is one of four books in the Shulchan Aruch). The laws in the Shulchan Aruch document Sephardic law and customs, written by Rabbi Yosef Caro of Safed in the 16th century. This is paired with the Ashkenazi legal rulings of Rabbi Moshe Isserles, whose additions to the Shulchan Aruch (called the Mapa) note where the Sephardic and Ashkenazi customs differ.

[RABBI YOSEF CARO:] The wine of the nations (ie. non-Jews) is prohibited to derive pleasure from, and the same applies to their contact with our (ie. Jews) wine.

[RABBI MOSHE ISSERLES:] this is because of a decree regarding wine that was poured as a libation to idols. Nowadays, when it is not common for nations (ie. non-Jews) to make libations to idols, some say that the touch of a non-Jew to our wine does not prohibit its use for pleasure, only for drinking. Similarly, ordinary - non-sacramental - wine of theirs is not prohibited for deriving pleasure from it...

Taste one wine (and cheese pairing) and discuss the following as a group or in pairs..

- How do you feel about the concerns regarding who makes Kosher wine?
- What does this tell you about Jew's interactions with non-Jews in Rabbinic times? In the 16th century? Today?

How to Make Kosher Wine

Uncorking the Secrets of Kosher Wine by OU's Kosher Staff

Grapes arrive at the plant...[and] are then dumped into a hopper and moved into a destemmer, which shoots out the stems and crushes the grapes. The crushed grapes are pumped into a "treat tank," where they are treated with enzymes to help extract the juice. The juice is further extracted when the pulp continues into a press. Finally, the pits (which are bitter) and the skins are discarded. At this stage of the process, some wineries will run the liquid through a pasteurizer, cooking it at 190 degrees...[which] renders it *mevushal* [cooked or flash-pasturized], enabling a non-Jew to handle it from this point on. While most kosher wines are *mevushal*, the finer wines tend not to be, as the boiling process affects the taste...

To convert the juice into wine, fermentation (the process whereby sugar turns into alcohol) must take place. Fermentation can take anywhere from a few days to two weeks. Wine stops fermenting when the alcohol content is about 13 percent. To produce wine with a low alcohol content— 5 or 7 percent—the fermentation process must be stopped prematurely. Fermentation can be stopped either by cooking the wine, which will destroy the live yeast culture, or by adding sulfites to kill the yeast.

Once the fermentation process is over, the barrels or tanks are sealed. For kosher wine, the barrels or tanks have to be doubly sealed by the *mashgiach* [the Jew(s) who supervises the kashrut status of a kosher establishment]. The *mashgiach* can leave the winery, but must return every time it is necessary to take a sample to test the sugar level, for example, or to determine if more aging is necessary. Each time [they] return, [they] must check to ensure that the seals have not been tampered with. The *mashgiach* alone can break the seal and then reapply a new one. When the wine is ready to be bottled, the *mashgiach* must be present once again.

Mevushal: Kosher Wine and Grape Products by Chabad.org

Grape Ingredients in Processed Foods: All liquids produced from fresh or dried grapes, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic, such as grape juice and wine vinegar, are in the same category as wine in Jewish Law. Therefore, foods with grape flavoring or additives must always have a reliable hechsher. Examples are jam, soda, popsicles, candy, juice-packed fruit, fruit punch, and lemonade.

Alcoholic drinks such as cognac and brandy have wine bases. Liqueurs and blended whiskeys are often blended with wine. All such beverages require kosher supervision, as does herring in wine sauce. Cream of tartar is made from wine sediment and needs rabbinical supervision.

Taste one wine (and cheese pairing) and discuss the following as a group or in pairs...

- Why do you think a *mashgiach* [the Jew(s) who supervises the kashrut status of a kosher establishment] is necessary on a logistical level and a spiritual level?
- What do you think is spiritually significant about the *mevushal* [or cooking] of the wine? How does it change the liquid if at all?

The Role of Wine in Jewish Ritual

What Does Judaism Say About Wine? By My Jewish Learning

Judaism has a complicated, double relationship with alcohol — and, in particular, wine. On the one hand, wine, which “cheers the hearts of men” (Psalm 104:15), is a significant component of many Jewish rituals. Kiddush is recited on Shabbat and holidays over a cup of wine. Four cups of wine are integral to the Passover seder. Wine figures prominently in Havdalah (the ritual separating Shabbat from the rest of the week), Brit Milah (circumcision), wedding ceremonies and more. On the other hand, Judaism recognizes the dangers of intoxication which is implicated in some of the worst misdeeds reported in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the double-sided nature of wine is nowhere more explicit than in a rabbinic midrash which states that the Tree of Knowledge — the forbidden tree that Adam and Eve sampled, resulting in their expulsion from Eden — was in fact a grape vine. (Sanhedrin 70a) This alluring fruit opens new doors and new paths to awareness — but it is also deadly dangerous.

The Jewish Spiritual Heroes, Volume I; The Creators of the Mishna, Introduction 38

Out of concern for the sanctity of the Sabbath, the scholars prohibited the carrying into the street of such objects as are used in the performance of week day labor. In order to safeguard the Sabbath they ruled that it is to be observed from sunset on Friday till the stars appear on Saturday. At the same time they introduced the custom of pronouncing the Kiddush (sanctification) and Havdalah (separation) over a glass of wine at the beginning and at the departure of the Sabbath.

The Blessing Over Wine and Grape Juice for Shabbat Evening

Blessed are You, Adonai our Gd, Sovereign of all, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You, Adonai our Gd, Sovereign of all, who finding favor with us, sanctified us with mitzvot. In love and favor, You made the holy Shabbat our heritage as a reminder of the work of Creation. As first among our sacred days, it recalls the Exodus from Egypt. You chose us and set us apart from the peoples. In love and favor You have given us Your holy Shabbat as an inheritance. Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Shabbat.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen. Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'ratzah vanu, v'Shabbat kodsho bahavah uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'maaseih v'reishit. Ki hu yom t'chilah l'mikra-ei kodesh, zecher litziat Mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta, v'otanu kidashta, mikol haamim. V'Shabbat kodsh'cha bahavah uv'ratzon hinchaltanu. Baruch atah, Adonai, m'kadeish haShabbat.

ברוך אתה, אלהינו, מלך העולם.
 בורא פרי הגפן.
 ברוך אתה, אלהינו, מלך העולם,
 אשר קדשנו במצותיו ורצה בנו
 וישבת קדשו
 באהבה וברצון הנחילנו
 זכרון למעשה בראשית
 כי הוא יום תחילה למקראי קדש
 זכר ליציאת מצרים
 כי בנו בחרת, ואותנו קדשת
 מכל העמים
 וישבת קדשך
 באהבה וברצון הנחלתנו
 ברוך אתה, מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת.

Taste one wine (and cheese pairing) and discuss the following as a group or in pairs...

- What role(s) do you think wine plays in Jewish ritual practice?
- What themes are highlighted in the Blessing Over Wine and Grape Juice?
- How does this inform your understanding of the use of wine in Jewish ritual practice?