



## Using the wine aroma wheel

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The purpose of the wine aroma wheel is to facilitate communication about wine flavor by providing a standard terminology. Words included on the wheel are terms that are specific and analytical and not hedonic or the result of an integrated or judgmental response. 'Floral' is a general but analytical descriptive term, whereas "fragrant", "elegant" or "harmonious" are either imprecise and vague (fragrant) or hedonic and judgmental (elegant and harmonious).

The wheel has very general terms located in the center, going to the most specific terms in the outer tier. These terms are NOT the only terms that can be used to describe wines, but represent ones that are often encountered. Novice tasters often complain that they "cannot smell anything" or can't think of a way to describe the aroma of wine.

Fortunately, it is very easy to train our noses and brains to easily recognize aromas. The fastest way is to make physical standards to illustrate important notes in wine aroma.

With few exceptions, materials available from the grocery store are all you need. One of the few standards that cannot be provided is the floral aroma of Riesling, Muscat or Gewürztraminer wines. For this distinct floral, citrus aroma use Lemon-grass or get handi-wipes®. Put an opened Handiwipe® into an empty covered glass. alternatively, put Froot Loops® (a breakfast cereal) into an empty wine glass.

## WHITE WINES

If you are just beginning, it is easier to evaluate white wines; start by selecting some wines with large differences in flavor. For example, include an oaky, buttery Chardonnay (most Australian, or California ones will do), a "vegetative" wine (bell pepper, asparagus), a Sauvignon blanc from New Zealand or cool parts of California and a floral Riesling or Gewürztraminer from cooler parts of California (North or Central Coast), Oregon, Washington, Germany, Alsace (France). For a fourth wine, try an unoaked Chardonnay or Viognier.

## RED WINES

For the first red wine tasting choose wines with very different aromas such as a Pinot noir (Carneros or very cool central coast area of CA, Oregon, or red Burgundy), a Cabernet Sauvignon (for vegetative, get a wine from a cooler CA region; for a less vegetative wine, try Napa, Sonoma, Washington) and a black peppery Zinfandel (CA) or Syrah or Shiraz .

## Directions for making standards

Make standards in a neutral wine\*. For the most commonly encountered white and red wine aromas, the approximate recipes are provided on the next page, but they all need to be tweaked so the aroma is detectable but not overwhelming. Add more if the aroma is not identifiable; dilute with the base wine if it is too strong. Put the standards in wine glasses, covered with cold drink lids, plastic petri dish lids, watch glasses or even saran wrap. Covering the glass increases the intensity of the aromas and prevents the odors from permeating the entire room.

\* Neutral wine" has no defects or distinctive aroma; you could use an inexpensive bag in the box.

## White wine aroma standards

(in 1 oz neutral white wine<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)

- Asparagus (several drops of brine of canned asparagus)
- Bell Pepper (tiny piece of bell pepper; don't leave in too long)
- Vanilla (Drop of vanilla extract)
- Clove (One clove)
- Citrus (~ 1 teaspoon of *fresh* orange and grapefruit juice)
- Peach (several teaspoons of peach or apricot puree or juice)
- Pineapple (1 teaspoon juice)
- Honey (1 - 2 Tablespoons)

Having an unspiked wine makes it easy to identify the spiked aromas by contrast. Smell the standards first, smell the wines. Which terms describe each wine? If you come up with NEW aromas such as lichee/lychee—make a standard!

## Red wine aroma standards

(in 1 oz neutral red wine<sup>\*\*</sup>)

- Asparagus (several drops of brine of canned asparagus)
- Bell Pepper (tiny piece of bell pepper)
- Vanilla (Drop of vanilla extract)
- Clove (One clove)
- Soy sauce (few drops, great for older reds)
- Berry (Fresh/frozen berries and/or jams)
- Berry jam 1-3 tablespoons strawberry jam)
- Black pepper (few grains black pepper)
- Anise, black licorice (use few drops of anise extract)

<sup>\*\*</sup>Neutral wine<sup>\*\*\*</sup> has no defects or distinctive aroma

\*

## SPARKLING WINES

Sparkling wines have aromas listed on the table wine aroma wheel, such as citrus and berry, but they also have other notes. These occur in Champagnes and sparkling wines which are made by Méthode Champenoise and aged on the yeast before being disgorged.

### Sparkling wine aroma standards

(In 1 oz neutral white still wine<sup>\*\*</sup>)

- Lime (A few drops of Rose's lime Juice or squeezed lime juice)
- Apple (Sniff freshly cut apple)
- Toasted hazelnuts (Crushed nuts alone)
- Sour cream/yogurt (1Tbsp. in empty glass)
- Vegemite (Vegemite® or marmite®)
- Cherry/strawberry (Few drops of flavored juices or extracts)
- Nutmeg (few grains)
- Caramel (crush one Kraft® caramel)
- Vanilla (as for table wines).

## DEFECTS

Some of the commonly encountered wine defects can also be illustrated by making standards.

**Moldy Cork** the BEST standard is the actual example of the defect. Save a spoiled wine which has a moldy odor, produced by TCA (trichloroanisole).

### Oxidation

A few drops of sherry

## Volatile acidity (VA)

A few drops vinegar

### Sulfur

**H<sub>2</sub>S** Hydrogen sulfide, boiled egg or black sand from Japanese food store  
**Ethyl mercaptan** Smell of natural gas (tell people to experiment on their own carefully)

**SO<sub>2</sub> Sulfur dioxide** Dried apricots (which were treated with sulfite)  
Caution: Many asthmatics are very sensitive to it!

### Brettanomyces (A wild yeast)

Drop of creosote or piece of old fashioned Band-Aid (a horsey, sweaty saddle, barnyard smell)

To obtain a colored, laminated plastic version of the wine aroma wheel in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) or Sparkling wine aroma wheel in English and wine aroma tee shirts, go to

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See video at

[www.winearomawheel.com/how-to-use-it](http://www.winearomawheel.com/how-to-use-it)