

Wine myths and facts

Learn about wine chemistry with a round of fact-or-fiction

The shape of the wine glass matter

FACT

Many of the flavors we notice when enjoying a glass of wine are actual smells. Oxygen interacts with the compounds in the wine to enhance flavors and release aroma molecules. The shape and width of wine glasses control how much of the wine's surface area is exposed to air, and thus how much of a wine's aroma gets released.

Another perk?

Ethanol vapors form a ring within wine glasses, creating an empty circle at the center perfect for getting a good whiff of wine without the overpowering scent of alcohol.

Those flavor notes are actually in your wine

FACT

When the menu lists grapefruit or bell pepper as flavor components, it's no lie. That's not to say there's grapefruit or bell pepper in wine, though. The grapes used to make the wine, the yeast used to ferment it and the barrels in which the wine is aged all contribute scent compounds that resemble those of produce or other plants.

You need to let the wine "breathe"

MAYBE

Letting a wine "breathe" helps introduce oxygen and can help enhance flavors, but only in some cases. Pouring a bottle of wine into a different container, or decanting, helps mix air into the wine more rapidly. This accelerated breathing can boost pleasant aromas and softens any harsh flavors from tannins in young red wines. BUT too much air can give bacteria a chance to get going, turning wine into vinegar. For the most part, you can get away without decanting and just let the wine breathe in your glass.

What's the sediment at the bottom?

Some of the sediment is pigments, proteins and sugars from the grapes, but there may also be crystals of potassium bitartrate (or cream of tartar).

Whites should be served cold and reds at room temperature

FICTION

Americans serve whites too cold and reds too warm. Wine's temperature affects how quickly those aroma molecules can move around and escape, so serving a white too cold dampens its delicate flavors. Aroma molecules, including ethanol, from a red that's too warm can overwhelm your nose. A good rule of thumb is to put red wine in the fridge for 15 minutes before you serve it, and take white wine out of the fridge 15 minutes before you serve it.

* Learn more facts and myths about wine

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