

The 2023 vintage

Very good forecast despite capricious weather

Although conditions were somewhat turbulent at times, the course of the year to date has fuelled high expectations for this year's vintage. According to estimates, the harvest volume is expected to be around 2.3 million hectolitres. The course is set for another successful year for Austrian wine. Alongside a good quality of wine, this success can also be explained by the positive export trends and the affinity that Austrians have with their country's wines.

Johannes Schmuckenschlager, President of the Austrian Winegrowers' Association, expects a promising 2023 vintage. "Following a climatically turbulent and challenging season that was marked by severe storms, we are forecasting a wine harvest of around 2.3 million hectolitres – slightly lower than the volume of the previous year. Nevertheless, we are expecting a very good quality of wine. With this year's growth cycle having been characterised by alternating spells of rainfall and hot weather, the perfect course has been set," reported Schmuckenschlager at a press conference in Vienna this week. However, the coming weeks will be critical – and everyone is hoping for sunny weather. "High production costs are still a concern for winegrowers, however," confirmed Schmuckenschlager.

Chris Yorke, CEO of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (Austrian Wine) also responded positively to the forecast for the 2023. "With yet another excellent vintage, the course is set to continue the successful growth of Austrian wine – international markets included. Despite the difficult situation over the past few years, our vintners managed to grow export values in 2022. On the domestic market, the release of Sturm [Ed.: partially fermented grape juice from Austria] marks the start of a key sales period for the wine industry. Austrian Wine is supporting this with a focus on revenue-boosting areas, such as wine tourism, the promotion of high-quality Riedenwein (single-vineyard wine) and Reserve wine for the festive season, and the Sekt Austria concept," Yorke said.

A local survey conducted by the Austrian Winegrowers' Association on awareness, consumption and the identity of Austrian wine has yielded some pleasing findings. Sixty-nine percent of respondents considered wine to be important for the Austrian identity as a product of key cultural significance. Seventy-four percent of those surveyed confirmed that they drank Austrian wine. Furthermore, almost half of the respondents base their purchasing decision first and foremost on the winery or the winegrower.

Very changeable weather throughout 2023

To date, the weather in 2023 has been positive. The year kicked off with a very dry winter, followed by a mix of warm and cool days in March. April was remarkably cool, yet the second half of the month brought very welcome rainfall. The rather cool weather caused relatively **late budding** of the vines, at the end of the month. This was very good news, however, given the threat of late frost at this time of year. Fortunately, the cooler temperatures in early May **did not cause any late frost damage** either – a risk that persists in the vineyard until mid-May. The warmth of the vegetation period that began in the second half of May led to strong growth of the vines.

Blossoming began in mid-June in most wine-growing regions. “This late onset, compared to previous years, is viewed **positively** by the wine industry because a **later blossom** also means a later start to the ripening period – going more into autumn – when more moderate daytime temperatures and somewhat cooler nights can be expected. This generally leads to more harmonious wines with a well-balanced sugar-acid ratio,” explained Schmuckenschlager. Flowering progressed very well in most regions. Poor flowering conditions were extremely localised, unfortunately resulting in coulure.

The first **hot spell** of the year began at the end of June and lasted until the beginning of August, with temperatures largely staying above 30 °C. “Contrary to winemakers’ fears, **drought damage** was fortunately **kept at bay** – in contrast to the previous year – due to the ground having been well-supplied with water during the preceding falls of rain. Just a few young vineyards were adversely affected by the prolonged dry period. Precipitation at the beginning of August managed to refill the drained water reserves and was particularly important considering that the ripening period was about to start,” Schmuckenschlager added. The second heatwave of the year, which similarly saw temperatures in excess of 30 °C, enabled the **ripening** process to **advance very quickly**. Further precipitation was recorded at the end of August, which is especially important for the grapes to ripen fully.

Schmuckenschlager is hoping for nice, dry weather over the next few weeks to ensure that everything is in place for a very good vintage.

An average harvest volume expected

“In terms of volume, the 2023 harvest is expected to be average – forecasted at 2.3 million hectolitres, slightly below the previous year. This year’s grape crop was good, and only isolated locations experienced poor conditions for flowering,” explained Schmuckenschlager. Due to this year’s periods of precipitation, **some parts** witnessed an increased occurrence of **hailstorms**. Although these are bitter for the regions affected, the **impact on Austria’s total wine harvest remains negligible**. Similarly to the west of Austria, Steiermark (Styria) suffered badly from the heavy

rainfall at the beginning of August, which saw a massive amount of rain falling within a matter of a few days in some places, often resulting in landslides in the vineyards. To rehabilitate these vineyards, parts need to be cleared and well drained, before replanting can begin. “However, thanks to an incredible amount of work, good growing conditions could be maintained in most of the vineyards in Steiermark. Despite the region expecting a smaller harvest, the degree of ripeness reached in the last few weeks is an indication of a very good vintage,” confirmed Schmuckenschlager.

Although grapes are already being picked in some places – particularly Burgenland – for the production of Sturm, the **main harvest will begin somewhat later** this year. In Burgenland, harvesting is expected to start mid-September, compared to the end of the month in Niederösterreich (Lower Austria) and Steiermark (Styria). Austria’s main harvest, however, will take place at the **end of September** and during the first weeks of October.

One cause for concern: production costs

As in other production sectors, Austrian wine producers are still having to face particularly high production costs. Although energy prices have become relatively settled, energy-intensive production methods remain very costly. This applies to the production of packaging materials such as cardboard and glass. The high inflation that we are currently experiencing is causing problems for the wine industry, just as it is for the economy as a whole.

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