

Mountain State Wines

Get ready for a very unexpected taste of West Virginia.

By Cele and Lynn Seldon

Most people don't think of West Virginia when it comes to wine production.

However, the mountainous terrain and cooler temperatures actually lend themselves well to the growing of a wide variety of grapes in the Mountain State. And that's led to a proliferation of grape growers and wine producers here over the past decade.

Today, the state hosts a total of 19 wineries, with 15 currently open to the public for tastings and tours – which includes several meaderies (a winery that produces honey wines or meads) and winery/distillery combinations.

Three appellations, more properly known as American Viticultural Areas, make up the wine regions: the Kanawha River Valley, Ohio River Valley and the Shenandoah Valley. Due, in part, to the state's colder climate, the most successful types of grapes grown in these AVAs are French hybrid grapes such as Chambourcin, Seyval Blanc, Vidal Blanc, Norton and others. One notable exception is in the state's northeast corner of the Potomac Highlands area, where the rolling hills, even cooler temperatures, little rainfall and shale soil help to produce excellent Riesling grapes as well.

Starting in the south, **Daniel Vineyards** near Beckley is the largest winery in the state. Converting the 192-acre Twin Oaks Golf Course into a 20-acre vineyard in 1990, Daniel Vineyards now produces dry reds, semi-sweet whites and their award-winning blackberry and port



wines. Visitors can enjoy a glass and picnic lunch on the gazebo overlooking the original 7th hole, take a self-guided winery tour or pick their own blueberries in their three-acre blueberry patch.

A bit further north near Summersville, **Kirkwood Winery** is home to one of

West Virginia's finest wines, as well as the only locally-made bourbon whiskey at Isaiah Morgan Distillery. Although Kirkwood produces a few traditional reds and whites, the staples among its 30-plus styles are fruit wines, like blackberry and blueberry. For something truly unique, try the Appalachian strawberry-rhubarb, ramp onion or dandelion wines.

On the western side of the state, **Fisher Ridge Winery** is one of the West Virginia's oldest wineries and was started by a dentist who turned his home wine-making hobby into a business. Now, with five acres of vineyards on a 50-acre farm, Fisher Ridge is a perfect introduction to West Virginia wines. Don't miss the flagship red blend – Pork Barrel Red – and Hog Wild Viognier/Chardonnay blend.

Nearby in Spencer, **Chestnut Ridge Winery** was opened by artisan woodworkers and is part of the Chestnut Ridge Artist Colony. Featuring unique fruit wines, like the pomegranate or peach chardonnay, as well as some classic styles, visitors can sip while they shop for handcrafted artwork, paintings, woodwork and metalwork. They also can tour the vineyard, blacksmith shop, woodworking studio or simply relax on the deck overlooking town.

Lambert's Vintage Wine, Weston, WV.
WILD. WONDERFUL. WEST VIRGINIA.





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Did You Know?

The West Virginia Wine and Jazz Festival, held near Morgantown every September, has been celebrating West Virginia wines for more than 20 years. The 2016 festival will showcase eight wineries, along with local foods, music and artisans.

Did You Know?

The state has recently launched a new online wine and spirits trail guide that helps visitors navigate the wineries by region, along with suggestions of activities and attractions nearby.



Heading further north, **DeFeo Winery** is a little slice of Italian-leaning “Tuscano in Appalachia.” Producing only natural wines crafted in the family’s Italian tradition, its Sangiovese, Barbera and Cabernet Sauvignon will make lucky visitors think they are in the hills of Italy.

In Wirt County, **Stone Road Vineyards** describes itself as the intersection of where Italians, Germans and Hillbillies meet. Producing five reds, including a Mouvedre and Alicante, and three whites (Riesling, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc), Stone Road Vineyards is the perfect blending of quality French-American and Vinifera (European) grapes with new age vinting techniques.

The furthest northwestern winery is **WineTree Vineyards** in Vienna, north of Parkersburg. Visitors can walk through every step of the production of traditional dry reds, whites, and sweet wines with a winery tour.

In the northern region, **Forks of the Cheat Winery** in Morgantown probably is West Virginia’s most well-known winery and has racked up hundreds of awards and international accolades. Its reds run the gamut from bone dry to very sweet, the whites are tart and crisp to soft and fruity and the fruit wines come from locally sourced fruit including strawberry, blackberry, pomegranate, peach, apple and more.

Mountain Dragon Mazery, south of Morgantown in Fairmont, is a craft style mazery producing small-batch meads (honey wine) with honey from its own apiary and served in traditional glassware. Offerings include a classic honey wine, Black Cherry Red (honey-cherry wine fermented with tea), Black Cherry Blush (honey and black cherry juice with a splash of green tea), Cafe Monteverde Coffee Methyglyn (honey wine fermented with coffee) and more.

At **Heston Farm Winery and Distillery**, sweet and semi-sweet wines and premium Chardonnay and Merlot aged in French oak are produced and sold. Pinchgut Hollow Distillery makes the only buckwheat whiskey in the country, as well as novelty and moonshine-style whiskey. It’s fun to try them all in the tasting room and then pair favorites with the farm-fresh food in Foxfire Restaurant for lunch or dinner.

Appealing to those who may not typically like traditional dryer-style wines, **Cascarelli’s Old Country Wine** specializes in sweet, juice-like wine that comes from its two acres of American/native grapes including Concord, Niagara and Catawba. Nestled in the hills of Doddridge County in Salem, visitors can taste Cascarelli’s fruit wines at the farm or at many West Virginia festivals throughout the year.

With a winery and tasting room made from hand-cut stones, **Lamberts Vintage Wine** in Weston will captivate visitors as much with its Old World wines as they will with the architecture. Tastings include European whites, such as Pinot Grigio and Seyval, and reds, including Petite Syrah, Zinfandel, Shiraz and more while rocking by the fireplace. There’s also the opportunity to sip Lamberts’ sweet fruit wines while browsing West Virginia pottery and crafts. Or, tour the racking room, storage area and cooling room.

Capitalizing on the bee buzz bandwagon, **Kenco Farms Honey Wine** combines the centuries-old tradition of honey mead from its own locally-raised bees, with an Appalachian touch of fruity flavors from its fruits and berries, such as peach, blackberry, raspberry and blueberry. Other honey-made products, including lip balm, honey candy and honey sticks, are sold here too.

Located in the Potomac Highlands of eastern West Virginia, **West-Whitehall Winery** grows grapes and produces wine from French-American varietals that are hearty enough to withstand the colder and dryer climate of the eastern Alleghenies. From semi-dry Vidal Blanc and Seyval Blanc whites that resemble Rieslings to dry oak-aged reds that reflect the fruitiness of the Chambourcin grape, plus dessert and specialty fruit, berry and spice wines, West-Whitehall wines can be found at area retailers, festivals and competitions.

Also located in the Eastern Panhandle, **Potomac Highland Winery** produces award-winning fine table wines from its lush mountain vineyard and oversees every aspect of the production of its wines. ■