

FAQS

- *Hill Prairie Winery*

The Most Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a list of the questions most frequently asked about our wines and winery. People are curious about vineyards and the art of winemaking. We are always happy to answer questions or give a tour.

Q. How long does it take to make wine?

It depends on the type and style of wine you want to make. Most sweet and fruity wines can be made in a few months and are best consumed while still young before their fruity character begins to fade away. On the other end of the spectrum, a quality dry red wine could take up to two or three years before it has properly aged into a smooth and finished wine. This is due to the process of polymerization of tannins and elements in the wine that are harsh until this process occurs slowly over time.

Q. Do you make a Merlot wine?

No. Merlot is known as a vinifera variety grape. Viniferas are grown in temperate climates and will not survive our winters here in the midwest. This is why wine grapes have not been grown outside of those temperate climates until the introduction of French hybrids. These hybrids are a cross between established vinifera wine grapes and of various grape species native to the cold climate regions. This has allowed for wine quality grapes to be grown that have the agronomic traits to survive the cold winters here in central Illinois. These hybrids are the cousins to the familiar wine grapes you have heard of before. The hybrid names are not familiar to many wine connoisseurs. We are learning more all of the time about the capabilities of these varieties. There are many very good wines being produced from these grapes and there are new ones on the horizon.

Q. What does "dry" wine mean?

"Dry" is a term used to describe the sweetness or lack of sweetness in wine. It comes from the fermentation process whereby yeast cells break down the sugars in the grape juice to make alcohol and carbon dioxide. When all of the sugar is used up (fermented) by the yeast, the wine is considered dry. If there is a measurable amount of sugar left unfermented in the wine it is considered as "residual sugar" represented as a percentage of the total volume of liquid. For example, our Prairie Dew wine has a 4% residual sugar content. Our Chardonal has 0% residual sugar content and is a dry wine.

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Q. Do you make or offer any sweet wine?

Yes. You will find that most midwestern wineries make sweet wine. Not because sweet wine is the highest quality wine to make, but because many of our customers prefer and request sweet wine. We make a wide range of wines and we always strive to meet our customer needs. We all know the customer is always right! On the other hand, a winery's reputation for making great wine depends on their ability to produce quality dry wines. Our local wine culture is several centuries behind the traditional wine regions of the world when it comes to wine preference. It is a commonly accepted attitude that wine drinkers evolve over time and that if one really likes wine and drinks it often that your taste will gradually change from sweet to dryer wines.

Wines of all types and sweetness have a place and time. However, a wine that is too sweet will cover up much of the wonderful characters of the wine with natural sugars. Not all sweet wines are the same. A great way to explore and learn to enjoy dryer wines is to drink them with food. The experience can make both the food and the wine better together than alone. Stop by our winery and sample our various wines!

Q. Do you make your wines from Illinois grapes?

We grow most of our grapes in the rolling hills of Hill Prairie vineyard. We do purchase concord and niagara juice from New York State because we can buy it cheaper than it could be grown here. These two varieties are not considered premium wine grapes even though we have a large following for both varieties. We would rather use our vineyard space on other premium grape varieties. We grow or purchase from local growers for about 90% of the wine grapes used to make our wines.

Q. Do you offer a variety of beers for sale?

We offer a wide selection of popular beers. While we are a destination winery where we encourage customers to visit and spend quality time enjoying our natural setting and vineyard, we certainly want to meet the tastes of all customers. We recognize that not everyone enjoys wine. Therefore, we offer beer and soft drinks. We welcome customers of all ages and tastes and invite everyone to bring your friends and family to spend some relaxing time in our rolling hills. Take in the natural beauty in our vineyard. See our windmill and 100 year old barn that is home to the winery. You'll enjoy our relaxing view of our ponds from our indoor or outdoor porches.

Q. Do you offer hard liquor?

No. A winery experience is focused on the nature behind wine (our grapes) and the art of wine making. We take pride in our clean, family friendly, family owned business. We do not want to be a "bar" as there are plenty of those. Our goal is to provide you with a great experience and a friendly place for friends and couples to meet for a relaxing time.

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Q. Are wine glasses free at the winery?

The short answer is no. Unfortunately we have had to resort to charging a deposit on our wine glasses because many people wrongly feel entitled to take our logo wine glasses home with them. It is outright theft and we were losing a couple thousand glasses per year. The refundable deposit is \$3.00 per glass.

Q. Can I get my half full bottle recorked to take home?

You may now be able to take home an opened bottle due to legislation recently enacted.