The Bordeaux region is France’s largest wine producing region and includes more than 280,000 acres of vines and 60 Appellations d’Origine Contrôlées (AOCs). It is located in the southwest of France, surrounding the city of Bordeaux. Winemaking was brought to the region by the Romans sometime in the first century. Although the Bordeaux region is generally known today for its red wines, this is a relatively recent distinction. In the past, the Bordeaux region produced primarily white wines, with more than 80 percent of its vineyards devoted to Sauternes, Barsac, Bordeaux Blanc, and Graves. In the 1970s, red wine from Bordeaux began to gain attention, especially in Britain where red wine from Graves specifically was referred to as “Claret.” This rise in popularity resulted in a transition from white to red wine production in the region.

The Bordeaux region is home to 6,100 château owners and other growers who produced 650 million bottles of wine in 2019. The 2019 vintage comprised of 85.2 percent red, 4.4 percent rosé, 9.2 percent dry white, and 1.2 percent sweet white. Châteaux owners generally sell their grapes through a négociant, who acts as their middleman by purchasing their allocations of grapes and selling and distributing the resulting wine. Of the wine produced in the Bordeaux region, 58 percent is sold within France and the remaining 43 percent is exported to the rest of the world.

The Bordeaux region is divided geographically by the Gironde estuary into a Left Bank, Right Bank, and Entre-Deux-Mer, the area between the Gironde estuary and the Dordogne River. Six general terroir families are recognized by the region. The Left Bank features the Médoc and Graves and Sauternais. Médoc typically plants Cabernet Sauvignon and has a mix of clay soil and alluvial gravel terraces. Graves features gravelly soil due to past glacial activity and also plants primarily Cabernet Sauvignon, while Sauternais is known for its sweet white wines. The Right Bank is a rather marshy plain and features the Libournais and the Blaye and Bourg. Merlot and Cabernet Franc are dominant on the Right Bank. Entre-Deux-Mer is Bordeaux’s largest winemaking region and features a variety of vines. Finally, the more generic Bordeaux and
Bordeaux Supérieur appellations may be adopted by any wine produced within the Bordeaux region.

Of the vines planted in the Bordeaux region today, 89 percent are red varieties, with 59 percent Merlot, 19 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, eight percent Cabernet Franc, and the final two percent being Petit Verdot, Malbec, or Carmenère. Red Bordeaux wine is usually a blend, with labels commonly indicating the wine’s appellation rather than the specific grape varieties used. White varieties make up the remaining 11 percent of vines planted, with five percent of both Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, and one percent Muscadelle and other whites.

Climate across the Bordeaux region is characterized by long, warm summers, a wet spring and fall, and moderate winters. La Forêt des Landes, a large forest of pine trees, protects the Bordeaux region from the maritime climate influences of the Atlantic Ocean. However, winemakers in the Bordeaux region have begun to recognize the effects of climate change on their yields. In June of 2019, the Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur Associations approved the addition of seven new disease and heat-resistant grape varieties. These varieties originate in other parts of France and greater Europe and represent the first amendment to the region’s original 13 varieties since 1935. The seven new approved varieties include a mixture of red and white grapes: Marselan, Touriga Nacional, Castets, Arinarnoa, Alvarinho, Petit Manseng, and Liliorila.
References


