

History of Ontario Wine

The planting of grape vines and the making of wine in Ontario dates back to 1811, when a German-born man named Johann Schiller transplanted Pennsylvania-native labrusca and hybrids on 20 acres on the banks of the Credit River in Cooksville, approximately 20 km west of Toronto.

The modern era of winemaking in Ontario began in 1974 when Inniskillin was granted the first new winery licence since 1916 Prohibition. Within a few short years, more wineries opened and were integral in establishing a new-born industry through their pioneering efforts.

Committed to quality, Ontario wineries created the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) program to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards. Ontario boasts a vibrant grape and wine industry that enjoys continued growth. 🍷



1811

Johann Schiller transplants labrusca and hybrid grape vines on 20 acres in Cooksville, Ontario.



1866

Kentucky grape growers plant Catawba and Delaware vines on Pelee Island. Ontario's first winery is established - Vin Villa Winery.



1873

George Barnes opens Niagara's first winery, called The Ontario Grape Growing and Wine Manufacturing Company, later renamed Barnes Winery.



1890

There are 35 wineries in Ontario, mostly based in Essex County.



1927

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) is created to regulate distribution and sale of all wine, beer and spirits, and to regulate Ontario wine.



1983

First experimental Icewines are produced at some wineries. The first commercial Icewine is produced in 1984.



1979

German vintner Herman Weis buys 50 acres and plants Riesling in the St. Urban Vineyard. Currently part of Vineland Estates Winery.



1978

Early *vinifera* vineyards are established by Paul Bosc Sr. at Chateau des Charmes and the Pennachetti family on Cave Spring Vineyard.



1974

The Wine Council of Ontario is incorporated. In 1975, Donald Ziraldo and Karl Kaiser of Inniskillin receive the first new winery licence in almost 50 years (Inniskillin Wines).



1952

Brights Wines removes 600 acres of native vines to plant new *vitis vinifera* and hybrid varieties, and produces Canada's first *vinifera* wine in 1955.



1988

Ontario wineries create the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards that became law in 1999.



1991

Inniskillin 1989 Icewine wins Grand Prix d'Honneur at Vinexpo, Bordeaux, France.



1996

The Cool Climate Oenology & Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) is established at Brock University.



2000

Niagara College establishes a Winery and Viticulture Technician program and the Niagara College Teaching Winery.



2001

The first winery opens in Prince Edward County - Waupoos Estates Winery.



Future

Ontario has 140 VQA wineries and enjoys continued growth.



2011

The annual International Cool Climate Chardonnay Celebration is launched in Niagara, the first event assembling international winemakers for an event in Ontario wine country.



2010

New wineries open in "emerging regions" in Norfolk County and Grey County.



2007

Prince Edward County becomes a VQA appellation.



2005

After three years of study VQA designates two regional appellations and 10 sub-appellations within the Niagara Peninsula. Currently 75 wineries in Ontario.