

The wine of ice and night...



"In the small Canadian city of Beamsville, about 40 miles west of Niagara Falls, a small group of crouching silhouettes moves in a moonlight vineyard on a cold January night. They are picking up their harvest of grapes, totally frozen, from Gewürztraminer. With a starry sky, and ice crystals shining in the air, the temperature has fallen to -10°C : they are the ideal conditions for the collection of fruit with which the 'icewine' will be made, the ice wine of this vintage. "

It is likely that on some occasion you have heard of ice wine. That is why I am going to dedicate this article to this unique product, explaining its origin, evolution and, above all, the difference between ice wine and "freezer" wine.



At the beginning of the 18th century, when Louis XV offered Madame de Pompadour a glass of Tokaj sweet wine, the monarch referred to it as "Kings wine, king of wines" and the poor did not have time to taste it ... If so, I would have had serious doubts and competition with this ice elixir.

The wine of ice, scarce, rare, special, little known, the eiswein, is one of those magical wines ... It is a sweet wine made with naturally frozen grapes in the vineyard. The time and conditions of their harvest as well as the areas where they are obtained is what makes it special. There are white, rosé, red and even ice cider. They are tasty wines, with deep and sweet aromas, but soft and with an intense acidity. Named in English [ice wine](#) and in French [vin de glace](#), it uses the technique of over-ripening of the grape in the strain until frost occurs.

The grapes with which they are made are generally white, such as Riesling, Vidal (hybrid) banned in Europe, but popular in Canada - or Gewürztraminer, although there are also inks, such as Pinot Noir or Cabernet Sauvignon. Ice wines do not depend on a specific grape variety, but on a type of viticulture and winemaking.

The grapes must be harvested by hand in a frozen state in the cluster and pressed with the ice crystals, which causes a high concentration of sugars and acids due to dehydration, thereby improving the extraction of aromatic compounds. At the beginning of August the grape is selected and the clusters are even put in paper bags (similar to those of the Vinalopó grape) to preserve them and ripen more slowly since the sun does not affect so directly. It is a wine that always works with the uncertainty of whether it will freeze enough to be able to harvest since it is necessary to obtain a concentrated, very ripe grape that will take time to ferment.



On the other hand, this type of wine is obtained in cold regions of countries with low temperatures.



Ice wines are made in Canada - which is the world's largest producer -, United States, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg. In Spain, ice wines have been successfully produced in Rueda, with the Verdejo variety, in La Rioja, Palencia ... among others, with Tempranillo and Garnacha red varieties. Currently, the European Union recognizes that an ice wine can be considered that way when they use frozen grapes or that they were in the strain at the time of harvesting

and pressing. It is required that all grapes come from the same recognized region.

Its difficulty and shortage, because not all producers are willing to make this type of wine and that there must be very specific climatic conditions (not every year it is possible to make these wines), justify its high market price, which they have turned this type of wine into authentic "oenological jewels," according to many authors.

The '*cryo extraction*' or *cold extraction*, is a process by which grapes are artificially frozen and pressed, usually with the intention of making ice wines artificially. Through this system, sweet or semi-sweet white wines are obtained, although this system is increasingly used in the production of dry and aromatic white wines. The winemakers try to recreate the same natural conditions that occur in the production of authentic ice wines. Selected grapes are subjected to temperatures below zero (-6° or -7° C), to be pressed when they are still frozen.

Although it is a widely used winemaking technique that results in very interesting wines, the European Union does not allow them to be called "ice wines" since the grapes have been frozen by artificial methods.



Curiously there is also "Ice Cider."

In Spain the Asturian is famous and refers, for example, to what happened to the Germans with the grape to make wine or to the Canadians, who were frozen apples to make cider waiting for a ripening conducive to a high sugar content and / or alcohol. Of necessity, virtue: pressing the frozen fruit loses water and the must is more concentrated. The procedure was already applied by some cider maker in Asturias and the Denomination of Origin admitted it not long ago. Then, it has been incorporated by the brand El Gaitero, willing to standardize the renewal of that product beyond its crammed cider, and the result is called 1898, which is the year to which its winery goes back. This Asturian ice cider is a fruity ripe and sweet elixir, but the notes of lemon or tangerine, along with those of roasted apple— and a fresh acidity make it not cloying. Spend three months in barrel.

What do we drink it with?

It is a wine that is enjoyed a lot by itself, slowly, with kisses, as I like to call it to me, conversing with it slowly and with attention. Especially Canadians are very easy to enjoy, expressive and frank wines from the start. Germans usually need a little more time, both from bottle aging and freshly served by the glass. Some German ice wines appreciate even the decantation.



I like it as an appetizer, since high acidity makes us salivate and saliva prepares the stomach for digestion. Great with any type of foie gras, hot or cold, and wonderful with almost any type of cheese, although maybe a little less with goat's. If we accompany it with desserts, the ideal is that the dessert is not sweeter than the wine, so great with any type of fruit. With dark chocolate, better red ice wines (although generally they are pink in sight).

For the more daring, they work very well with pickles: the Vidal grape with orange duck and with some spicy Asian food, especially with Thai. The Pinot Noir is recommended couple with some deer loins.

ITS ORIGIN:

The origin of these wines dates back to the 18th century in the Franconia region (north of German Bavaria). Due to some circumstances of necessity, since the grapes were frozen and the wine growers did not want to resign themselves to lose the harvest, they decided to try the use of what they could of the frozen grapes, getting a very sweet and very appreciated wine that pleased who It proved and was an absolute success, which forced them to persist later in the system. However, large quantities of grapes were lost at that time due to the great fermentation problems.

They also say that...

In Dromesheim, in the Rheinhessen wine region (south-west of Germany) there is more documentation about an 1829 vintage, which has served the wineries in the area to proudly display a memorial sculpture with the legend «Dromesheim, birthplace of the Ice Wine », something that apparently does not belong to them, but that's the way it is. In that very hard winter of 1829 the forage for the animals was scarce and many vineyard owners decided to leave the grapes in the vineyard to feed the cattle during the winter ... Until some tasted a grape and, being surprised at the sweetness and acidity they contained, they decided to press and make the wine.