

Understanding Organic Wine Labels

Ever wonder what you're really drinking when you buy organic wine—or even if your wine's organic in the first place? Some organic wines don't advertise that fact on the label—in part because organic vintages of yesteryear didn't live up to taste expectations. Here's your guide to the somewhat confusing terms on the bottle. (Hint: The only difference between a 100 percent and 95 percent organic wine may be whether it was fermented with yeast.)

	LABEL	WHAT IT MEANS	WHO CERTIFIES IT	DRINK IT
	100% Organic	All ingredients must be 100 percent organic, which means no pesticides or herbicides prohibited by the National Organic Program. Makers may not add sulfites. (Because sulfites occur naturally in wine, "organic" doesn't mean sulfite free.)	Vineyard and winery are USDA accredited. May display the "USDA Organic" seal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coturri Winery: CoturriWinery.com ■ Organic Wine Works: OrganicWineWorks.com
	Organic	Ninety-five percent of the ingredients must be organic, and no sulfites may be added.	Vineyard and winery are USDA accredited. May display the "USDA Organic" seal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Badger Mountain Vineyards no sulfites added): BadgerMtnVineyard.com ■ Frey Vineyards: FreyWine.com
	Made With Organic Grapes	At least 70 percent of the ingredients are organic. Manufacturers may add sulfites, but the amount can't exceed 100 parts per million.	Ingredients are USDA certified, but the wine cannot carry the "USDA Organic" seal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bonterra Vineyards: Bonterra.com ■ Heller Estate: HellerEstate.com
	Biodynamic	Growers follow organic principals and focus on nourishing vines and soil through use of manure, crop rotation, lunar planting, and natural pest control.	Certified by the Demeter Association, an international nonprofit coalition. May also display the "USDA Organic" label.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cooper Mountain Vineyards: CooperMountainWine.com ■ Frey Vineyards: FreyWine.com
	Salmon Safe	Growers guard against runoff and protect local wild salmon habitats with measures such as cover crops and native tree buffers. Applies primarily to Pacific Northwest wines. (Note: Not all Salmon-Safe wines are organic.)	Certified by Salmon-Safe, a nonprofit organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Brick House Vineyards: BrickHouseWines.com ■ King Estate Oregon Wines: (made with organic grapes) KingEstate.com

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Much Ado about Sulfites Sulfur dioxide, a wine preservative, inhibits mold and bacteria growth, stops oxidation, and preserves flavor. Some organic vintners believe small amounts of sulfites are necessary to preserve their wine's character; others disagree. Fortunately, wine lovers have a choice about what they drink, and they can rest assured that organic wines generally contain fewer sulfites than conventional.

- All wines naturally contain low levels of sulfites, a natural fermentation byproduct.
- A tiny percentage of the population is highly allergic to sulfites (usually suffering asthmatic attacks).
- Conventional U.S. wines can contain up to 350 ppm of sulfites. Organic wine must have less than 100 ppm sulfites.
- All U.S. wines that exceed ten ppm must be labeled "contains sulfites."
- Many people are sensitive to sulfites. Reactions include headaches, burning sensations, hives, cramps, and flushed skin.