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### Organic Wines for the Holidays

By Heleigh Bostwick

Your holiday table is nearly picture perfect. The vintage cloth napkins you purchased on a whim match perfectly with your holiday décor. The napkin rings, candlestick holders and even your stemware are made of recycled materials. Platters are piled high with organic fruits and vegetables and hormone- and antibiotic-free meat and dairy products.

What's missing from this picture? Organic wine, of course! Perhaps you've considered giving organic wines a try but, from what little you know about organic wines, have decided they couldn't be much more than a step up from vinegar.

Despite what you may have heard previously, this is no longer true. Organic wines have improved tremendously over the past 15 years and are now on par with most "regular" wines, receiving favorable ratings in the '80s and '90s by wine experts like Robert Parker and winning awards in wine competitions. Unfortunately, though, there is still some confusion about what an organic wine

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really is.

## What is organic wine?

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program, a wine can only use the word "organic" on the label if it is made with certified organically grown grapes, contains less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of sulfites and has no additional sulfites added during the winemaking process.

If a wine is made with certified organically grown grapes but contains more than 20 ppm (and less than 100 ppm) of sulfites, it may be labeled "made with certified organically grown grapes." Under the current USDA regulations, it cannot technically be called an organic wine. Most consumers refer to both of these wines as organic.

USDA labeling practices are a bone of contention with those in the organic wine industry. "Some sulfites occur naturally in all wines and minimal amounts of sulfites are added during the winemaking process to preserve and stabilize wine. Wines made with organically certified grapes containing less than 100 ppm of sulfites are essentially 99.99% organic, yet can't be labeled organic.

In no other category of the food and beverage industry do these same requirements apply in order for a product to be labeled organic," says Barne (Barney) Feinblum, the president, CEO and founder of Organic Vintners. He is also former chairman and CEO of Horizon Organic Dairies and former chairman, CEO and president of Celestial Seasonings.

To add to the confusion, many people consider vegan and biodynamic wines to be organic wines as well, but this isn't always the case. Vegan and biodynamic wines may be organic wines or made from certified organically grown grapes — or they may be neither.

Vegan wines are made entirely without animal products and use bentonite clay or carbon instead of egg whites or casein, a type of milk protein, during the clarification process. Biodynamic wines use grapes grown under a specific sustainable farming practice developed in Europe in the 20th century and still used today by some vineyards in the United States and Europe.

## A surprising variety of organics

Whether you like red wine, white wine, dessert wine or champagne, there is an organic wine to suit your style, budget and taste. Depending on your location and community, your local wine store may carry a reasonable selection of organic wines; however, the best



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place to buy organic wines is online — especially now that interstate wine shipping regulations have changed.

### Holiday picks

Ceago Vinegarden, one of the leaders in the California biodynamic and organic wine industry, offers these recommendations for your holiday table.

- Ceago Vinegarden 2004 "Jeriko Vineyard" Chardonnay Made with grapes certified organic by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), this fine, ripe-flavored wine has rich aromas of banana cream, cinnamon and pear and pairs well with turkey, ham, fish and vegetarian dishes as well as hors d'oeuvres.
- Ceago Vinegarden 2001 "Camp Lema" Merlot This merlot is grown and certified Biodynamic by Demeter. It has aromas of anise, cherry and mocha plus hints of cinnamon and vanilla and pairs well with a traditional roast beef dinner.
- Ceago Vinegarden 2001 "Camp Masut" Cabernet Sauvignon Grown and certified Biodynamic by Demeter, this elegant wine has incredible cherry aromas with a hint of violet and flavors of black currant, raspberry and mocha. It pairs well with many vegetarian dishes as well as roast beef.
- Jeriko Estate NV Brut The first sparkling wine in the United States to be made with certified (CCOF) organically grown grapes, this crisp sparkling wine with a hint of almond is perfect for any occasion — as an aperitif, with dessert or with hors d'oeuvres.

Cheers!

© Heleigh Bostwick

Heleigh Bostwick is a freelance writer based in Vermont. She is the editor of [All Info About Parenting Multiples](#) and publisher of [Marigold Lane](#), an online resource for simple living with a green twist.



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