

2018 Vintage Report for Spain

After several dry, hot vintages this year the rain came to Spain and in some regions the rainy spell lasted until early summer. It was also a much cooler year with more gradual vine development and one where intense work in the vineyard was often necessary to keep yields in check and vineyard diseases at bay.

The harvest began later and, with the benefit of fine weather in most of the country, picking took place steadily and well into the autumn. Yields were far more generous than last year and this should leave Spain in a strong competitive position.

As regards quality, the best wines will be found where there was careful management of vines and selection of grapes in both the vineyard and the bodega. Wine styles are often described as 'more Atlantic': fresher, with good aromas, slightly lower alcohol levels and good varietal definition. This bodes well for youthful wines as well as those destined for barrel ageing.

In brief:

- Weather: a cooler year with far more rain; fine harvest weather for most regions
- Regional highlights: a far better year for Ribera del Duero, Bierzo, most areas of Castilla y León and Valdeorras. Record crops for Campo de Borja and Monterrei and more generous for Rioja and Cariñena
- Wine character: fresher wines with moderate alcohol levels and strong varietal character.
- Estimate harvest yield: 48 million hl(wine and must) (source: OEMV)

Our report of Spain's 2018 harvest is divided into the following regional sections:

1. Galicia: Rías Baixas, Monterrei, Ribeiro, Ribeira Sacra and Valdeorras
2. Castilla y León: Bierzo, Cigales, Tierra del Vino de Zamora, Tierra de León, Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Toro
3. The north: Rioja and Navarra
4. Aragón: Campo de Borja, Calatayud, Cariñena and Somontano
5. Castilla-La Mancha
6. Catalonia, Majorca and Eastern Spain
7. Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

Galicia

DO Rías Baixas

The growing season was far more typical in Rías Baixas this year featuring more rain and moderate summer temperatures. As rain continued into May, together with low temperatures, there were fears that volumes would be down. Conditions were more challenging in the smaller sub-regions of O Condado do Tea where growers battled with mildew and O Rosal where some of the crop was lost due to poor weather during flowering.

Thanks to settled sunny and dry weather with moderate temperatures over August and September the key ripening period was very positive and grape quality was generally very good as the harvest started in early September.

Emilio Rodríguez, technical director for Terras Gauda in O Condado, is very pleased with the harvest this year. He said: “We got a good number of sun hours and good temperatures through to mid-September which gave us the right balance in the grapes. The aromas are better this year – in 2016 and 2017 we lost some [of Albariño’s] typical aromas. We’ve got a more typical profile for the variety this year.”

Volumes were higher than expected in the main Val do Salnés sub-region of the DO with the overall figure for the entire region slightly below last year’s total.

2018: 38.6 million kg

DO Monterrei

There was a record harvest for Monterrei this year and it was also unusually long starting on September 15th and lasting well into October. Spring rains and cooler than average temperatures in May, June and July slowed the development of vines leading to a later harvest but dry, favourable weather allowed growers to bring in the region’s wide selection of grapes at optimum ripeness. There are high hopes for “excellent quality” for Godello white wines along with Treixadura, Doña Branca and Loureira and reds produced mainly from Mencía.

2018: 5.6 million kg (white: 3.69 million kg; red: 1.9 million kg)

DO Ribeira Sacra

For Galicia’s leading red wine DO – Ribeira Sacra – fine weather during the harvest compensated for some challenging weather during the growing period including mildew and some incidences of hail.

As in neighbouring regions the harvest started in mid-September allowing growers to benefit from cool night-time temperatures and achieve good acidity levels in both red and white grape varieties. For the first time, some night-time harvesting took place in Ribeira Sacra this year. There was general satisfaction as the harvest drew to a close after 39 days.

2018: 6.2 million kg (Mencía: 5.2 million kgs)

DO Valdeorras

After very testing weather in 2017, there was great relief in Valdeorras as more generous volumes came in at harvest time and excellent fruit quality.

Slightly higher acidity levels and optimum ripeness bode well for “very good” Godello wines from this vintage, according to the region’s harvest report. Meanwhile prospects also look good for red

wines made from Mencía, both young wines and barrel-aged thanks to the variety ripening particularly well.

2018: 4.7 million kg, 15% up on last year

DO Ribeiro

Ribeiro's vineyards were badly affected by mildew, which reduced volumes this year, but producers were satisfied with fruit quality thanks to favourable weather towards the end of the growing season and harvest with careful selection being particularly important this year.

Total: 9 million kg (8.3 kg white; 785,000 red) provisional figures

Castilla y León

DO Bierzo

The harvest outcome for Bierzo is radically different to 2017: production is up by 26% and the wines are described as "fresher and more Atlantic in style" with lower alcohol levels. Grape quality was described as "exceptional" by regional authorities.

Bud break took place during the first and second weeks of April which is the typical timing for this region and signalled that the vines had largely recovered well after the 2017 spring frosts.

Rain was the main concern over the growing period especially during June and July when temperatures were cooler than usual.

2018: 11.3 million kg (Mencía: 8.9 million kg)

DO Cigales

The harvest report for Cigales declares "a generous crop and excellent grape quality" this year. To the relief of bodegas and growers production has bounced back – up 40% - after severe weather impacted on the 2017 harvest.

Tempranillo is the main grape for Cigales and plays a leading role in reds and rosés. There are high hopes for structured reds with good ageing potential as well as 'balanced, aromatic' younger wines. Garnacha, though still only accounting for small volumes in the DO, is increasingly finding its way into rosé and single varietal wines marking a new trend.

2018: 8 million kg

DO Tierra de León

This year's harvest has exceeded expectations with a dramatic increase after two difficult vintages. Leading grape Prieto Picudo recovered well flanked by Tempranillo. White grapes are also gaining ground here especially Albarín and Verdejo. There are high hopes for fresh, aromatic whites and rosés as well as various styles of reds.

2018: 3.8 million kg

DO Tierra del Vino de Zamora

The harvest was generally satisfactory for DO Tierra del Vino de Zamora with the exception of some areas which were affected by mildew or oidium and where hail had caused issues.

2018: 644,273 kg; 53% red (mostly Tempranillo); 47% white (Verdejo, Malvasía, Moscatel and Albillo)

DO Ribera del Duero

Ribera del Duero bounced back this year bringing in a far more generous crop after a more favourable and contrasting growing season. There was ample rain over the winter and spring and although there were some isolated cases of frost, these were minor compared to 2017. Growers were often surprised by the recovery of vineyards affected by last year's frost; generally vines in these areas produced fruit albeit in modest quantities. Nor were there significant incidences of mildew due to rainy weather and the key ripening period leading up to harvest was also problem-free.

Temperatures were lower than usual during July but above average in September and October with fine weather for the entire harvest which was longer than usual starting in mid-September and continuing through October. Vines matured more rapidly in the case of those with smaller clusters (having been affected by the frost the previous year) while those with larger bunches matured later on the whole.

The wines from this vintage are likely to be fresher in style with excellent fruit definition and good potential for a range of red wines from lively, youthful styles to those for barrel ageing.

Álvaro Maestro, technical director at Bodegas Emilio Moro is very optimistic about this year's wines. He said: "The 2018 vintage shows good balance, similar to the 2016 or 2014, without overly high alcohol levels or overly ripe fruit and good levels of acidity. As a result the wines have a medium to high colour content and structure with good ageing capacity and extraordinarily rich aromatic qualities."

2018: 125 million kg; 55 million in 2017

DO Rueda

Rueda's vineyards recovered well after some issues with frost in 2017 and very dry weather. However the weather was challenging, especially in the spring and early summer with late rains and lower temperatures slowing vine development. There were some issues with mildew and oidium in vineyards and a few hail storms. However, much better weather followed and especially over the harvest period which started, as usual, with Sauvignon Blanc grapes, followed by Verdejo.

Albert Ustrell at Bodegas Félix Sanz is pleased with the outcome for both quality and volume this year: "We got great freshness and the right levels of acidity for high quality wines... and lower alcohol levels." Ustrell sees good prospects for Rueda wines at different quality levels and he strongly believes that 2018 will be a "good endorsement" for the smaller, quality-orientated producer while in the mainstream category he foresees good value for money.

2018: 130.5 million kg (mostly Verdejo)

DO Toro

The growing season in Toro saw more winter and spring rain than recent years and a light frost in May caused some concern. This, together with cooler temperatures than usual in July, meant that the harvest started later than usual for the Tinta de Toro variety and it was particularly long due to some areas ripening significantly earlier than others.

Fruit quality was described as “fresh and balanced” with “perfectly healthy grapes”. Early indications from the bodegas point to red wines which will be fresher and a little less structured than those of the previous vintage with “fine intense flavours and great ageing potential”.

2018: 22 million kg (mostly Tinta de Toro)

The North

DOCa Rioja

The harvest report from authorities in Rioja describes 2018 as “a complex year with a marked Atlantic influence”. The growing season was not without challenges especially in the spring and early summer. Spring was cold and humid with a lot of rain which delayed bud break and showery weather during flowering led to outbreaks of mildew and the need for treatments in the vineyard. The early summer period was also rainy with much hotter sunny weather following in August allowing the vines to catch up. The ripening process continued gradually with cooler weather than usual in September which favoured good balance in the fruit but resulted in a protracted harvest which, having started in the warmer areas in late August, got into full swing in the second half of September with the last fruit being picked in mid-November.

This year’s harvest was more generous, with far higher volumes than last year while wine styles are said to be fresher and alcohol levels are generally a little lower than recent years reflecting the cooler year.

Angel Benito of Bodegas Urbina in the north-west of Rioja (Rioja Alta) says that spring rains affected the flowering period and reduced yields naturally so, unlike some years, the bodega saw no need to green harvest in the early stages of the growing period. He also said that Tempranillo fared better than Garnacha which is more sensitive during flowering.

Benito described 2018 as a “very technical year” in the vineyard with constant work to ensure the best conditions for vines over the early summer rainy period and occasional rain storms. Mildew had to be kept at bay and towards harvest excessive vigour had to be controlled through green harvesting to “get a normal yield” and the desired wine quality.

He concluded that 2018 was cooler than it had been for five years. Young wines are showing “normal” concentration and fresh acidity giving good ageing potential from “a more typical year”.

Santiago Garde is the technical director at Bodegas del Medievo at Aldeanueva de Ebro in the warmer Rioja Baja. He describes 2018 as “atypical” for the area and very rainy with high production, especially for younger vineyards. “It’s better [for us] to have a cooler year; the crop came later but the results were good with lighter and fresher wines after the very hot 2017”, he said. He added that late ripening could have been a problem, but thankfully the weather during October was fine allowing for complete ripeness and steady harvesting which finished later than usual in the Rioja Baja. Garde concludes: “The wines will be good to very good from this vintage”.

2018: 486 million kg (88% red; 12% white)

DO Navarra

The harvest is 30% up this year for Navarra after a more typical harvest and “exceptional” weather in September which boosted fruit quality across the region’s wide selection of grape varieties. White varieties including Chardonnay, Garnacha Blanca and Moscatel de Grano Menudo accounted for 13% of the crop while reds varieties such as Tempranillo, Garnacha, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Graciano made up the remainder.

2018: 78 million kg

Aragón

DO Campo de Borja

Campo de Borja's harvest was far more generous than last year's modest crop, indeed this is a record year for the region. This was due to a variety of climatic factors which all favoured volumes and quality according to the region's authorities: generous rainfall replenished water reserves over the winter and spring; there was no frost and hail; the flowering period and fruit set went smoothly (a major advantage for Garnacha) and favourable weather over the summer and autumn allowed fruit to ripen well and steady harvesting.

2018: 44.2 million kg (49% Garnacha); 82% up on 2017 and 56% higher than the 10 year average

DO Calatayud

In Calatayud the winter period was cold and dry with little rain or snow. Bud break got off to a good start raising hopes for good volumes, but low temperatures and rain affected some areas and older vineyards in particular which were already weak after recent exceptionally dry years. Summer was cooler than usual with hotter temperatures following in late August and September. There was also some stormy weather with modest rain which was welcome in the pre-harvest period to boost vine development. The harvest was less than hoped for but up on last year with loose bunches of small, healthy grapes boding well for quality.

2018: 11.2 million kg (mostly Garnacha); 35% up on 2017

DO Cariñena

Growers in Cariñena benefitted from favourable conditions this year; the harvest for the region was more generous than last year and 29% higher than the 10 year average.

2018: 109.6 million kg

DO Somontano

The harvest was more generous for Somontano this year where volumes were up by 20% thanks to generous rainfall and favourable ripening conditions. It started later than usual with Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot being harvested in late August and progressed gradually for almost two months as Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Garnacha reached optimum ripeness. It was largely uninterrupted with just four days of rain.

According to González Byass, owners of Viñas del Vero: "White grapes generally ripened more easily than the red however the long maturation on the vine has meant that we have been able to achieve some fabulous aromatic character and good colour."

2018: 18.7 million kg

Castilla-La Mancha

DO La Mancha

The harvest in DO La Mancha was between 15-20% up on last year depending on area and was described as generous compared to recent years. Fruit quality was good across the wide range of

grape varieties grown, red and white, with fresh acidity and balance thanks to cooler temperatures and slower ripening compared to last year. The harvest was much longer finishing in mid-October.

2018: Figures not yet available from DO authorities

Catalonia, Majorca and Eastern Spain

DO Catalunya

It was a much more typical year for DO Catalunya in terms of volumes and harvest dates and although there were isolated cases of hail and spring frosts they did not impact significantly on the final result. Fruit quality was described as “very good” at the point of harvest and alcohol levels are a little lower than last year.

2018: 49.7 million kg; 12% up on 2017

DO Penedès

Unlike last year the harvest came relatively late in Penedès and it was more generous despite some unpredictable weather. As the report from Miguel Torres states, this included higher than average temperatures in the April-October period compared to other Catalan wine regions.

Torres described “slow and steady” ripening in general and there was satisfaction with the final quality despite having to contend with some outbreaks of mildew and botrytis due to fresh and humid conditions in the run-up to harvest.

Grapes generally ripened well and Torres highlights “optimum ripeness” for Chardonnay, Tempranillo and Moscatel de Frontignan this year.

2018: 52 million kg

DOQ Priorat

The harvest was more generous in Priorat thanks to generous rainfall and a favourable growing season which was without any major complications.

Joan Sangenís of Celler Cal Pla described 2018 as “a bit strange” after a series of much hotter years for the region. He said: “Mid-summer was much fresher than usual so we had slower ripening but it was good; it reminded us of how it was in the past here.” He added: “The fruit quality was very good – very balanced in terms of structure, flavour and acidity”. Sangenís said that all varieties ripened well this year, especially Garnacha.

The report from Bodegas Miguel Torres also described a very positive vintage with steady vine development and, unlike many years, less vine stress and “perfect ripening” thanks to more moderate summer temperatures and better water reserves. In summary Priorat wines are likely to be quite different in style from this vintage compared to those of recent years.

2018: Figures not yet available from DO authorities

DO Montsant

Volumes in Montsant were slightly up on 2017. Red varieties represented over 90% of the crop, led by Garnacha and Cariñena.

Total: 7.4 million kg

DO Binisallem (Majorca)

The harvest drew to a close in DO Binisallem on October 5th. Manto Negro, the leading red variety, was the last to be picked along with (red) Moll and Moscatel.

Significant rain during August and September made this year challenging for growers and it was important to select grapes carefully in both the vineyard and the bodega to ensure quality in the final wines.

2018: 1.6 million kg

DO Jumilla

Miguel Gil Vera at Bodegas Juan Gil described 2018 as a “very different” year with far more rain and fresher weather influencing the outcome in the vineyards and the character of the wines from this year’s harvest.

He described the spring as “almost ideal” and good summer weather, however the autumn saw far more rain than usual in the region which led to a challenging vintage. It was also a long harvest lasting until early November. Gil said: “We had to do several harvests in the vineyard and we selected fruit carefully in the winery but we got good fruit on the whole. The wines are less structured this year, with less balsamic notes and less alcohol than usual.”

Production levels are generally around 20-25% higher than last year for the region.

2018: 60-70 million kg (approximate figure)

DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

Jerez saw more plentiful rainfall this year with an unusual amount of rain over the months of March, April and May. Temperatures were lower than usual in early summer with few days featuring the typically hot Levante breeze. Vine development was relatively slow as a result and the harvest started a little later than usual on August 23rd.

As the last Palomino grapes were picked around mid-September there was general satisfaction over quality despite some challenging weather this year. The crop was also fairly generous, up 8.6% on 2017.

2018: 81 million kg

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Report compiled by Patricia Langton for Wines from Spain