

2017 Vintage Report for Spain: a challenging year in the vineyard but high quality at harvest.



Extreme weather was seen across the wine world in 2017 and Spain was no exception. For most Spanish regions there were one or more climatic challenges to contend with including spring frost, drought, untypically high summer temperatures and occasional hail storms. Then, mercifully, the going got easier as more typical weather arrived for the August and September ripening period and generally very favourable harvest conditions.

Frost hit areas where it rarely does in Spain – many areas of Galicia were affected with only Rías Baixas getting off lightly. Castilla y León, with its wide stretch of regions from Ribera del Duero to Bierzo, often sees some frost but this year it hit with a vengeance. Jerez was one of the few areas to escape and the central area of Castilla-La Mancha only suffered frost damage in isolated areas.

The long drought and a very hot early summer period tested some varieties, especially non-indigenous ones. Older vines and bush vines with deep roots coped better with the extreme weather and soils with good water retention were a bonus.

The harvest was generally low-yielding and early, having been brought forward by an early bud break. But the length of the harvest varied and thanks to fine weather growers could wait for the best time to pick waiting for each area to reach maturity. In some cases where there was a secondary growth on vines after the frost, the result was a later growing cycle and vines reaching maturity at more typical dates.

Grape quality was often reported to be high with healthy bunches of smaller berries showing intense flavours and excellent ripeness. As always, those offering the best wines from this vintage are likely to have selected their grapes carefully.

While yields are down in 2017, this harvest comes after more generous ones for many Spanish regions in recent years and this should safeguard against supply shortages.

2017 harvest: 36-38 million hl (wine and must)

(Estimate at 30.11.17)

Source OEMV

Our report of Spain's 2017 harvest is divided into the following regional sections:

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

Galicia

DO Rías Baixas

“This has been a textbook vintage,” says Augustín Lago, technical director at the Consejo Regulador in Rías Baixas. Indeed it seems that 2017 has been a very good year for the Atlantic region where producers are hailing both high quality and very good volumes.

There was very little frost damage in Rías Baixas in April with the exception of a few areas in the Ribeira do Ulla sub-region. In fact spring temperatures were a little higher than usual while the summer temperatures were fairly typical.

In terms of rainfall the year was exceptionally dry and while this meant that vine treatments were largely unnecessary and vines remained free of mildew and botrytis, there was some vine stress due to the lack of water. Jesús Álvarez, technical director at Agro de Bazán in the Salnés Valley, said: “This year was a complicated year. The flowering period was good but we got lower yields – the berries were very small – due to the lack of rain.” The small amount of rain in early September came too late to make a significant difference for Agro de Bazán but it did have the benefit of cleaning the grapes before they were picked, he added. Álvarez described fruit quality at the time of harvest as “excellent” with very good acidity and ripeness (alcohol levels are around 13°C). “The wines have excellent natural acidity which will give them a long life as well as great aromas.”

2017: 39 million kg; 17.8% more than 2016

DO Monterrei

The harvest in Monterrei was both early and long due to problematic weather during the growing period. Vines that had flowered early and were unaffected by the April frosts were ready for harvest by late August marking a much earlier start than usual. Harvest continued into early October for later ripening varieties and vineyards which had recovered after the frosts and produced grapes. A particularly dry summer also had an influence on the yield resulting in smaller berries and bunch weights.

2017: 2.9 million kg. Leading grapes are Godello (1,408,421 kg), Mencía (801,552kg) and Treixadura (339,127kg). This year's crop was down 35% on 2016.

DO Ribeiro

It wasn't an easy year for growers in Ribeiro with spring frost and late summer hail to contend with. Fine, dry weather well into autumn brought much relief allowing the harvest of the regions wide range of grapes to take place at a gentle pace and in three stages.

Picking started rapidly on August 28th in locations where it was felt that the hail of the previous day could impact on quality. The second stage saw most of the region's grapes picked according to a more typical timing and – moving well into October – the final stage focused on vineyards which recovered after the frost, bore some fruit and matured at a later date. Despite modest yields, fruit quality was “excellent” according to the Consejo Regulador.

DO Ribeiro has increasingly focused on white indigenous varieties for higher quality wines in recent years. This year the indigenous variety Caíño Blanco joins the ranks of the ‘*preferente*’ (priority) whites including Albariño, Godello, Lado, Loureira, Torrontés and Treixadura.

2017: 9.5 million kg. White varieties represent over 90% of the crop. (2016: 11.6 million kg)

DO Ribeira Sacra

The harvest started promptly this year in Ribeira Sacra on September 7th and it was not particularly long according to the Consejo Regulador. The weather during the growing cycle meant that it was not the easiest of vintages due to uneven ripening in the vineyards. However favourable harvest weather allowed growers to pick gradually and wait for optimum fruit quality. The total harvest is slightly lower than in 2016 but in line with the average of the last five years.

2017: 5.5 million kg. Main grapes: Mencía (4.7 million kg); Bracellao (37,804 kilos) and Merenzao (49,136 kilos).

DO Valdeorras

A cocktail of weather complications challenged growers in inland Valdeorras where the crop is 11% down on 2016, which was also a difficult year due to mildew. This year, with an early and positive flowering leading to high hopes, frost hit on April 27-28th and the misery continued with hail on May 10th and August 27th, just two weeks ahead of the harvest.

The areas worst affected by frost were Vilamartín de Valdeorras, A Rua, Petín, Larouco and O Bolo with lesser damage to Concello do Barco, according to the Consejo Regulador. It states that around 40% of the crop was saved through measures to mitigate frost damage. There was also untypically low rainfall throughout the year in Valdeorras together with a very hot summer with heat spikes and occasional stormy weather all making for a very challenging year.

At Bodegas Valdesil owner and technical director Borja Prada describes 2017 as “apocalyptic” as one challenge followed another. He explained that frost is not uncommon in the region but that the temperatures in March were unusually warm which advanced vine development. Then the temperature dropped to -6°C on the night of April 27th; many vines didn't recover. But for Valdesil the drought and heat were the overriding concern: “There was so little rain, the situation was exceptional... older vines and bush vines performed better as their root system is more developed and they have more canopy,” Prada explains. Having vineyards in a variety of locations and a large

proportion of old vines helped Valdesil through a challenging growing season. Its crop was down by 25% with “some very good fruit and some average fruit” said Prada. Others were less fortunate.

2017: 4.2 million kg. Godello (2 million kg); Mencía (1.3 million kg)

Castile-León

DO Bierzo

Producers in Bierzo are upbeat about quality however volumes are low due to adversities during the growing season, especially for its flagship red grape: Mencía.

Frost on the night of the April 26th hit some parts of Bierzo badly, especially areas to the east of the DO: Ponferrada, Campo, Los Barrios, Molinaseca and Congosto suffered severe losses of 90-95% while Villafranca del Bierzo, Parandones, Villadecanes, Valtuille de Arriba and Corullón, all located in the west, lost 10-30% of the crop. Higher lying vineyards and south-facing vineyards were generally unscathed or hardly affected.

Although Mencía vines hit by frost showed new shoots afterwards, they failed to produce fruit, especially in the case of old vines which are the most prevalent in Bierzo’s vineyards. However the case was the opposite for Godello vines which did manage to fruit after the frost.

Another complication for growers was the absence of rainfall over the 2016/2017 season: there was just 330mm of rain over the agricultural year compared to a more typical year which sees 600-700mm. While this had an impact on volumes, the upside was the absence of vineyard disease and “exceptional” quality at the point of harvest.

2017: 9.1 million kg. Mencía (7 million kg); Godello (677,573 kg)

DO Cigales

Located to the west of Ribera del Duero, Cigales brought in a very modest crop, down 33% on 2016 due to frost, low rainfall and a very hot summer. But, according to the Consejo Regulador, high quality compensates for low volumes. According to its vintage report: “The lack of water and high temperatures over spring and summer means that there was no disease” and “the vines focused their energy on smaller bunches, and as a result, the fruit was very concentrated and of excellent quality.”

2017: 5.8 million kg. Leading grape is Tempranillo. Others include: Garnacha, Verdejo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

DO Tierra de León

The harvest report from the region’s Consejo Regulador refers to “the most difficult vintage in the history of DO Tierra de León”. Frost was the main culprit and the outcome was worse than initially feared as vines (mostly Prieto Picudo) struggled to recover by the time of harvest. The fruit on

vines in the northern area of the DO, which was most severely affected, remained largely unpicked. As a result this year's crop is very low, 70% down on 2016.

However, its report highlights the positive outcome for the white Albarín variety which held up well in this difficult year and even produced slightly higher yields.

Almost all the red grapes from this harvest are being vinified for "rosado" wines. This is the most popular wine style from this DO and the profile of the fruit from this vintage – strong aromas, freshness and lively acidity – also make it the logical choice.

2017: 1.3 million kg. Red grapes: Prieto Picudo, Mencía and Tempranillo. White grapes: Albarín and Verdejo

DO Tierra del Vino de Zamora

In DO Tierra del Vino de Zamora the harvest was shorter than usual due to low yields; it lasted just 20 days compared to 30 in a more typical year. There was far more satisfaction over the "great quality" of the fruit than quantity: the crop was down by 56%, indeed it was the lowest for a decade. As in so many areas of Castilla y León this was due to frost, hail and the relentlessly dry summer.

2017: 512,104 kg. Red 63%; White 37%. Leading grapes: Tempranillo, Malvasía and Verdejo.

DO Ribera del Duero

Frost is not uncommon in Ribera del Duero but it was particularly severe in 2017 and most notably on the night of April 27th. Its persistent character – the temperature fell below 0°C for over seven hours even dipping to -6°C – dramatically reduced the crop. Much of the region was affected, to a lesser or greater extent depending on location. The growing year was also exceptionally dry: rainfall was just 250mm compared to 450mm in an average year, according to the region's Consejo Regulador.

Cillar de Silos, located at Quintana del Pidio in the centre of the region, lost 80% of its own production and was one of the worst affected this year yet just 10km away vineyards lost 20-30%, explained Amelia Aragón. What they have managed to make for their Cillar de Silos wines is "very good quality with lovely structure and fruit, but there is not enough of it," she continued. However the producer will be able to offer more wine under its El Quintanal label which is made from grapes sourced from 120 growers in the region. "We'll be selling less young wine this year and focusing more on crianzas", Amelia concluded.

2017: 55 million kg, 98% Tempranillo. (The crop was 133 million kg in 2016).

DO Rueda

The growing season in Rueda was characterised by an early bud break, followed by frost at the end of May and an exceptionally dry summer which accelerated the ripening process in vines unaffected by frost. This led to an early harvest – the first Sauvignon Blanc was being picked by mid-August – and modest yields. Final figures show a crop down 23% on 2016 with the region's traditional grape, Verdejo, accounting for most of the production.

Much of Rueda's harvest now takes place at night, by machine, which allows the grapes to be picked under significantly cooler night-time temperatures preserving their freshness and aromas and avoiding oxidation.

In such a hot, dry year some producers staggered their harvest in a bid to get the right balance in their wines. Bodegas Beronia organised a "double harvest": an early round of picking with an emphasis on freshness and acidity and a later one for structure and a more developed fruit character.

2017 harvest: 83.4 million kg; (109 million kg in 2016)

DO Toro

The harvest in Toro was early and long due to the very dry conditions. It started on August 24th and continued gradually until October 13th as growers waited patiently for grapes to reach optimum ripeness across the region after very dry conditions. Indeed the drought dominated the growing season; April frosts were of less consequence as was the occasional summer hailstorm.

However, the region's extensive vineyards of Tinta de Toro - generally bush vines and of a considerable age - generally withstood summer weather well and produced "unbeatable quality" according to the Consejo Regulador. The total crop was down by 34% on 2016, a particularly generous vintage which will help producers to maintain steady volumes.

2017: 15.7 million kg. 75-80% of the harvest is hand-picked.

DO Arribes

For Arribes, the smallest DO of Castilla y León bordering Portugal, it was an exceptionally dry year but hardly touched by frost. While this brought the harvest forward, yields were largely in line with recent years and fruit quality was described as "exceptional" leading to high expectations for this year's wines. This result underlines the fact that the region's flagship grape Juan García has adapted "exceptionally well" to the Arribes climate, according to Carlos Capillo, technical director at the Consejo Regulador.

2017 harvest: 984,148kg. Main grapes: Juan García - 486,254kg and Tempranillo - 325,263kg.

The North

DOCa Rioja

For Rioja much of the growing cycle was far from textbook perfection but there is satisfaction and great relief over the quality of the crop after much-needed August rains and good weather over the harvest period.

Rainfall was low over the winter period and as the growing season got under way, weakening vine resistance when frost struck on April 28th. After a warm spring vine development was also well advanced making matters worse. The impact of the frost was most severe in the higher Rioja Alta

and Alavesa, particularly in the eastern area from Labastida to Elciego. In some cases the vines did not recover for the 2017 crop in these areas.

For the first time in the region's history, Rioja's Consejo Regulador examined frost damage on an individual basis applying three levels of maximum yields depending on the extent of the damage. Its report talks of "an unprecedented number of vineyard inspections" this year.

At Viña Pomal in the Rioja Alta, frost is largely responsible for reducing the crop by 20%; in some areas of the 230 hectare estate yields were 50% lower and intense work was carried out to remove damaged buds. Despite this setback, there is optimism over the final result from this warm vintage and wines with "higher alcohol, an enormous backbone, extraction and ageing potential in addition to lovely fruit".

Also located in the Rioja Alta, Finca Valpiedra was more fortunate. The team here happened to take preventative measures against frost which had been previously trialled at its vineyards in La Mancha. Vines were treated to improve water retention and thus avoid frost damage over 80 hectares on three different terraces. It worked and, while yields are a little low, the vintage is showing "extraordinary quality" with good acidity, great structure, long aging potential and elegance according to Marta Martínez.

Barón de Ley lost 10% of its crop to frost damage in its northern Cenicero vineyards but frost wasn't an issue in the Rioja Baja where most of its vineyards are located. Here the drought was the main concern and responsible for low yields according to Mayte Calvo, head winemaker. She explained that achieving enough acidity was challenging this year. It was a particularly good year for Graciano which reached "perfect maturation" thanks to some help from irrigation while Garnacha showed "high sugar content" and "alcoholic degrees slightly above the 2016 vintage" and Tempranillo showed good sugar levels and polyphenol content. She highlighted the value of blending different varieties in a year such as this to achieve the best results.

2017: 359 million kg (442 million kg in 2016)

DO Navarra

The vineyards of DO Navarra got off lightly when it came to adverse weather in 2107; there were some incidences of frost – the northern Ribera Alta was the area most affected – and while the drought is largely responsible for lower yields, the lack of water was generally manageable thanks to fairly extensive irrigation, especially in the warmer south of the region.

Probably the earliest on record, the harvest started in the southern Ribera Baja on August 16th and lasted around eight weeks, as in a typical year. Moscatel de Grano Menudo grapes for sweet wines were the last to be picked.

Throughout the harvest the weather was favourable with well-balanced rainfall and temperatures that were not excessively hot on the most intense days of the harvest, according to the Consejo Regulador. This favoured a "slower and more complete ripening" which was crucial for the final quality.

The crop was down 27% compared to 2016 but 15% lower than the average of the last five years.

2107: 60 million kg. Varieties grown include red varieties - Tempranillo, Garnacha, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Graciano and Syrah and white varieties – Chardonnay, Viura, Garnacha Blanca and Moscatel de Grano Menudo.

Aragón

DO Campo de Borja

The harvest in Campo de Borja began early on August 8th with Moscatel and Chardonnay before focusing on Garnacha, the region's flagship variety. Yet it extended over three months despite a 30% drop in volume on 2016. This is explained by dry conditions in the spring and summer which resulted in modest bunch weights but very healthy grapes. The region's report highlights the absence of vineyard diseases of any kind thanks to both dry conditions and successful efforts to combat "*polilla del racimo*" (European grapevine moth) here in recent years. Quality is expected to be "very good" for the 2017 wines according to the Consejo Regulador.

2017: 24 million kg

DO Cariñena

A warm spring and hot summer weather advanced the growing cycle from the point of flowering and grapes developed rapidly over the hot summer. The harvest started in some areas on August 20th however rain towards the end of the month was welcomed to slow the ripening process and provide much needed water before dry conditions continued during September. Fruit quality was described as "excellent" as harvest drew to an end and the last parcels of Cariñena and Garnacha were picked in higher areas towards the end of October.

2017: 72.4 million kg. (Around 14% down on the 10-year average)

DO Somontano

Located in the foothills of the Pyrenees, Somontano's harvest was one of the earliest on record with picking for whites including Sauvignon Blanc starting on August 4th followed by other earlier ripening varieties – Chardonnay, Merlot and Gewürztraminer – and continuing with later ripening reds – Cabernet Sauvignon, Parraleta, Garnacha and Moristel.

This year yields were lower for the same reasons seen in many other regions: spring frost affected 10% of the vineyards while dry, hot weather resulted in lighter bunch weights, especially for red varieties. Thankfully the winter and spring had seen a reasonable amount of rain.

At Viñas del Vero, head winemaker José Ferrer is upbeat about quality, particularly for native varieties: "The health of the grapes is exceptional and the quality is outstanding as we have suffered from no disease throughout the growing cycle. The reduction of fruit on the vines has led to great concentration in the musts which are rich and full of flavour and promise," he said.

2017: 15.5 million kg (16% less than 2016). Reds account for 68% this year and whites 32%.

Castile-La Mancha

DO La Mancha

The central area of Castilla-La Mancha escaped from frost although there were a few unwelcome hailstorms in early summer. Drought was the over-riding factor resulting in yields being down by

15-20% or as much as 30% on 2106 depending on the area. However some “very good quality” can be expected despite lower volumes for this region which offers a wide selection of white and red wines.

2017: (Figures not available from DO authorities)

Catalonia, Majorca and Eastern Spain

DO Catalunya

Adverse weather reduced the crop quite significantly in DO Catalunya: late spring frosts took their toll especially in northern areas of the region as well as in central zones. There were also isolated cases of hail and, as elsewhere in Spain, extremely dry conditions.

Despite these setbacks grapes ripened well with average-high alcohol levels and well-balanced acidity, according the Consejo Regulador.

Yields were particularly low for red varieties, down by 25.5% as a group. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Tempranillo showed drops of 30%; Garnacha fell 13% and Syrah 24%. Yields across white varieties were generally better, and even more generous than in 2016: Parellada was up 17%, Xarel.lo by 23% and Moscatel de Alejandría by 5.2%. But Macabeo yields were much lower, down by 26%.

2017: 44.5 million kg; 17% less than in 2016

DO Penedès

Winter rainfall was more generous than the previous year replenishing water reserves and helping vines to withstand an exceptionally dry spring and summer. With many varieties already in bud, spring frosts were very unwelcome and they hit some areas badly – the subzones of Alts d’Ancosa and Costers del Montmell lost up to 90% of the crop – and there were some incidences of hail.

These adversities and the drought mean that the harvest is around 20% lower than an average year. However, after higher than average temperatures in June and July the weather was more moderate for the main ripening period over August and September. In fact temperatures were a little lower than usual with very little rain over the harvest period. The harvest started 10-15 days earlier than usual and it was relatively short.

The report from the Torres Family describes 2017 as “an excellent year for quality... ripening has been gradual and the grapes have remained very healthy, so we have been able to harvest them at the optimum point of quality and ripeness”. Whites are said to have “good aromatic intensity with plenty of freshness and reds are “generally of a high standard” showing good aromatic intensity on the nose with well-balanced tannins.

2017: (Figures not available from DO authorities)

DOQ Priorat

In Priorat the early part of the growing season was much warmer than usual with scarce rainfall advancing vine development rapidly. This pattern continued during the growing cycle which featured very high temperatures in June but more moderate temperatures than a typical year for the ripening period in August and September. There was some well-timed rain at the beginning of September just before harvest got into full swing.

In view of the dry conditions, the vines were less rigorous channelling their energies into fewer bunches with plenty of grapes, especially for Garnacha and Cariñena which generally produced higher bunch weights and showed better results compared to Syrah and Cabernet.

The team at Scala Dei were certainly surprised by Garnacha this year in terms of both yield and quality. Yields from both its licorella slate soils and higher plots with clay and limestone soils were both higher than last year and “the higher the plots were, the more balanced the alcohol, acidity and must pH levels were” according to winemaker Ricard Rofés. The lack of rain also favoured quality - just a small quantity didn’t make the grade from lower, south-facing plots due to raisining, he said.

In general Priorat’s crop “was characterised more by the low weight than the quantity of grapes,” said Sal·lustià Álvarez, president of the Consejo Regulador. He added that the new vineyards which have come on stream this year also boosted the crop a little. (Priorat’s vineyards have expanded from 1,930ha in 2015 to 1,980 ha this year with new plantings comprising flagship reds Garnacha Negra and Cariñena and a small proportion of Garnacha Blanca.

2017: 6 million kg; 12% down on 2016.

DO Binisalem

Harvest started on August 7th, a week earlier than last year, with Merlot for rosé wines along with Moscatel and Chardonnay. Other whites including Moll, Chardonnay and Giro followed as well as red varieties Callet and Syrah. By October 4th the last of the red varieties – Cabernet Sauvignon, Gargollassa and Manto Negro – had been picked. The island’s traditional varieties, notably Gargollassa and Manto Negro, generally showed better resistance to a very dry and hot summer. While the crop was 24% lower than in 2016 grape quality across the varieties was very satisfactory.

2017: 1.6 million kg. (72% red / 28% white)

DO Jumilla

Despite a very dry spell from March to the end of August, yields of Monastrell, Jumilla’s main grape, were normal reflecting this variety’s good resistance to drought. For all other varieties (including Macabeo, Verdejo, Syrah, Tempranillo, Garnacha Tintorera) there was a drop of 5-15% depending on area. Rain finally came in the first week of September allowing vines to complete the ripening process.

Alcohol levels were a little lower than last year and the crop’s overall rating is expected to be good to very good.

2017: 77.6 million kg

DO Valencia

This year's harvest in Valencia is described as "very good" despite lower yields compared to the previous harvest. The drought was the main issue except for the Alto Turia area where the frost was more severe.

At Celler del Ruore in the Clariano subzone harvest started on August 7th, much earlier than usual. It began with Macabeo and Chardonnay, followed by Garnacha Tintorera and Merlot concluding with Monastrell and Petit Verdot.

A highlight of this vintage is Moscatel, the variety that Valencia is traditionally well-known for. It is grown mostly in the "Moscatel" subzone and this year, in contrast to all other varieties, yields are 15% up.

2017: 90 million kg; 15% lower than last year.

DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

The growing season in Jerez was largely unproblematic; indeed the growers and bodegas in the Sherry-producing region celebrated a very good vintage in 2017.

There was a typical amount of rain over the growing season and, importantly, it allowed the vineyards to absorb the water gradually as opposed to storms and torrential rain.

Summer was typically hot and dry but a few morning frosts helped the soils to retain their moisture. The hot, eastern *Levante* wind featured in 2017: in mid-May it was particularly strong and left some destruction in its path. It returned in the summer as harvest approached, but it was more moderate at this point and accompanied by high temperatures. This encouraged generous sugar levels in the fruit and the earliest harvest in the region's history on August 1st starting, as usual, inland before moving to the coastal vineyards.

The harvest was generous and fruit quality was described as "unbeatable" with virtually no disease. Potential alcohol levels were a "very satisfactory" 11.8°C on average.

César Saldaña, managing director of the Consejo Regulador, says: "The 2017 vintage has definitely been a very good one and much better than initially expected in volume terms and with a very high level of quality as a result of very good climatic circumstances through the year."

2017: 75 million kg: 31.5% up on 2016

(Report compiled by Patricia Langton for Wines from Spain)