

Tennessee Wine

Once the third-largest grape-growing state in the nation, Tennessee's wine industry is growing by leaps and vines.

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

The hottest culinary trend these days is an increased focus on local ingredients. That's great news in terms of freshness and quality, but it also makes travel a whole lot more interesting for your taste buds. So when contemplating what beverage to pair with a flavorful meal of Tennessee trout, mustard greens and sweet potato pie or Memphis-style barbecue, corn bread and black-eyed peas, it makes perfect sense to consider Tennessee wines.

Tennessee may be better known for its whiskey than its wine, but that wasn't always the case. Vineyards flourished in Tennessee during the late 1800s, but the Prohibition in 1919 put an end to that. "My understanding is that before Prohibition, Tennessee was the third largest grape growing state in the nation behind California and New York," says Kix Brooks, country music superstar and founding partner of Arrington Vineyards in Williamson County. Tennessee now ranks 25th in the nation in terms of number of wineries: The state currently houses more than 30 wineries plus 99 grape growers. And those numbers are expected to climb.

"Grape production represents a significant portion of Tennessee's fruit industry," says Dan Strasser, director of market development for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "In terms of land use, grapes rank only behind apples and peaches. Given that almost all Tennessee grapes are utilized in the production of a value-added product (wine), the economic value of this crop is greater than any other fruit crop in the state."

"Because our temperatures can be especially cold in winter and warm in summer, our climate is ideal for American native grapes," says Louisa Cooke, president of the Tennessee Farm Winegrowers Association and owner of Beachaven Vineyards & Winery. Winemakers across the state produce a variety of wines in different styles, yet native grapes such as Concord, Niagara, Cayuga, Catawba, Delaware and Muscadine (which is unique to the southeast) and Norton (which is also called Cynthiana), are most common. While wineries and vineyards routinely welcome visitors year-round, Tennessee grapevines typically are in full leaf by the end of April, grow fruit

