



## Why Blueberry Wine?

In Maine, we know our wild blueberries are special. Smaller, sweeter, more packed with antioxidants, a mosaic of colors and flavors, this native 10,000 year-old wild fruit grows almost exclusively in the glacial soils here and to the north in Canada. It is the original blueberry, foraged by our paleolithic ancestors and still harvested every August, this special time when local markets, roadside stands, and tables briefly burst with the vibrant, fragile fruit that tastes like summer in Maine.

What's less known about Maine's wild blueberry is that it's secretly great for making wine.

When a winemaker looks at a blueberry, we know we're not looking at a grape, but there's also something intriguing and familiar: the right chemistry for wine, a fruit that even shares a certain affinity with the white wine grapes of Champagne. And so in considering how to approach blueberry wine, we think about Champagne's sandy slopes and meager soil which lie near the same latitude as Maine's barrens and produce a tart fruit with low sugar and vivid minerality. These conditions gave birth to one of the great innovations in winemaking, a combination of bubbles and dosage that brings out the unique fruit and character of that special place.

That's why the Champagne style can serve as an inspiration for wild blueberry wine.

Like a distant cousin, wild blueberries can make a delicious, complex, age-worthy, low alcohol sparkling wine that evokes the acidity and minerality that gave birth to the world's original sparkling wine, while also expressing character unique to the wild blueberry and Maine--its soil and climate, the *terroir*.

Maine's wild blueberry thrives in the well-drained, sandy loam granitic soils where glaciers slid into the Atlantic at the end of the last ice age. Once river deltas buried beneath a mile of ice, today these inland soils are more than 50% sand, with high acidity ranging between 3 and 5 pH and a very thin layer of organic matter. As in grapes, the stress the wild blueberry faces--poor nutrients, excessive drainage, cold temperatures--leads to complex flavor. Wild blueberries grow on twig-like stems that spring up from the earth and are only inches high, with each carrying just a few small berries. Their fragility belies the depth of flavor and deep pigment.

That's why, for a winemaker, blueberries have the potential to achieve the sort of transparency and expression of place that wine can. Many people who love wine know the delight of tasting a certain place, perhaps a continent away, captured in a bottle. Wines of place seem to share in common the

winemaker's intention to make such a wine, and while winemakers rarely agree on how ripeness, maceration, fermentation temperature or a million other things impact the imprint of terroir on a wine, it is a wonderful mystery of wine how it does this. Not with every bottle and not every time. But that certain wines can be a voice of a place.

Wild blueberry wine is such a wine. In wild blueberry wine, with two pounds of fruit in every bottle, it seems you can taste the hard winter *and* the burst of summer sun; a tension between acidity and flavor tells the story. The granite in the soil, the salty minerals left by the retreating glaciers. The purity of Maine's air and water, hills veined with rivers, the rocky coastline, forests of fir, pine, cedar and maple. It's a wine of surprises: crisp and tart, naturally low in alcohol, with bubbles releasing blueberry aroma, yet a completely different experience from the familiar pies and jams and even fresh picked berries. A wine that captures the concealed essence of a blueberry and the forces that created it.

This wine can be both the fun, easy, refreshing picnic wine for cured meats and aged cheese, or the crisp counterbalance to rich salty foods like fried clams, buttery lobster, turkey with gravy and stuffing. It can be elegant: the solo experience of drinking an aged bottle with unique complexity and expression of Maine's land and past and place. Or it can be an ingredient, adding its deep blue color, bubbles and acidity to cocktails or deserts, where bartenders and cooks find its affinities with citrus, smoke and sweetness.

With Maine's ever-growing reputation for authentic, world-class food and drink, it's hopeful to imagine a growing world of wild blueberry wine. Maine deserves more blueberry wine. As good as our wild blueberries are, they don't travel well, and only a small fraction of the yearly crop can be eaten fresh; very few good value-added products exist that highlight its unique qualities. What would it look like to walk into a wine store and see three shelves of wild blueberry wines from Union and Machias, Blue Hill and Bristol, small craft makers from Portland to Bar Harbor? How could that change the equation for Maine's struggling wild blueberry farmers?

It's easy to forget that grape winemaking was once a small farm cottage industry--or that cider was considered an odd beverage footnote in the U.S. just thirty years ago, before growing from 100,000 cases/year to more than 30 million/year today. Wild blueberry wine has incredible potential to be Maine's most truly Maine drink that expresses this unique, unspoiled place--and evokes the great qualities of the world's beloved sparkling wines.