

# THE FIVE BIGGEST MISTAKES HOME WINE MAKERS MAKE WHEN BOTTLING WINE & HOW TO AVOID THEM

After investing your time and energy to make your homemade wine, you want to make sure you bottle it correctly. These are the biggest mistakes you can make while bottle filling:

## 1. **Failing to Keep a Clean Bottling Environment**

Failing to keep a clean bottling environment can lead to contamination. Bacterial contamination interferes with the wine's maturing process. It is the main cause of wine failure during the bottle filling stage.

Each bottle you use should be thoroughly cleaned and scrubbed before use. Bottles can be sterilized by boiling them or by putting them in an oven at a temperature of 300c. Avoid using plastic bottles since they can be difficult to sterilize.

All bottling equipment should also be cleaned and rinsed before every use. Otherwise, there could be microorganisms or residue inside the equipment which will contaminate the wine during the bottling process.

Use equipment with made with food-grade components. Stainless steel fronts and trays make cleaning easier. Remember, wine is highly acidic will react to metals like aluminum, brass or copper to form metal salts. Try to find a bottle filling system with a continuous flow design that eliminates places where bacteria can grow. The easier the unit is to clean, the less chance there will be of contamination.

## 2. **Overexposing the Wine to Oxygen**

The second most common mistake made when bottling when is letting the wine get overexposed to oxygen. This is referred to as "oxidation", and it is the same process that turns a peeled apple brown. With wine, oxidation leads to a loss of color, aroma, and flavour. Red wines suffering from oxidation will look slightly brown, especially when viewed in a tilted glass. White wines will look slightly amber in color. White wines, in fact, are more susceptible to oxidation than red wines.

Oxidation doesn't just affect the color of the wine. It affects the taste as well. Oxidized wine will have a nutty or caramel aroma. In extreme cases, the wine may even begin to resemble raisins or cough syrup.

Overexposure to air can occur at any point during the winemaking process, but particular care must be taken during the bottle filling process. Poor bottling practices can add 0.5 to 2 mg of O<sub>2</sub>/L to the wine. This can reduce your wines shelf life. One of the worst culprits is splashing the wine while bottling.

Avoid gravity fed bottle fillers where the liquid sits in an open trough as it slowly transfers into the bottle. Use a bottling system that reduces the amount of jostling the wine undergoes minimizes the contact the wine has with the outside environment, and lessens the chances of harmful oxidation. Doing so will help make sure you have the highest quality product for your customers, family, or friends.

## 3. **Letting Other Gases Get Absorbed into the Wine**

Many bottling systems rely on tanks of gas like CO<sub>2</sub>, Argon, and Nitrogen. In addition to being awkward, heavy, and expensive, these gases may cause problems with the quality of your wine. Excessive amounts of Argon can strip wine of its aroma.

Too much CO<sub>2</sub> will get absorbed into the wine. The result is carbonated wine that fizzes slightly when it is poured.

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### **Inconsistent Fill Levels**

How much wine you put into each bottle can affect the quality of the wine. Put too little in, and you risk exposing your wine to too much air. Put too little in, and you could end up with leaky bottles.

Every winemaker's goal should be that each bottle of wine created is as fresh and delicious as possible. In order to achieve these consistent results, proper bottling is essential.

The typical fill point on a 750 mL bottle of wine is 64mm from the top when filled at 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Remember that wine expands within a bottle as it gets warm. For every degree above 68 degrees Fahrenheit, wine expands 0.166mL in volume. Proper fill levels allow for expansion should the wine become warm. Failing to account for this can cause pressure to build up which can cause the cork to loosen. Loose corks increase the risk of bottle sickness and can lead to leaky bottles.

If you want consistent results, it is essential that you fill each bottle of wine you produce to the same level. Bottle fillers that have a digital control will produce consistent results. When looking at a bottling system, consider its flow rate accuracy, whether each unit is factory tested, and whether you can easily calibrate your own bottle volumes without having to consult a hard-to-read manual.

### **Not Having Fun**

Don't forget that making wine should be fun and not a chore. Doing everything possible to reduce the work involved with bottle filling will help make the process more enjoyable.

Many bottling systems involve:

- Numerous complicated connections
- Finicky levelling
- Moving heavy tanks of gas into place
- Manually priming a pump which can be messy and wasteful
- Repetitive bending or having to work with a unit on the floor rather than at table height

Using a bottling system that avoids these problems and has a quick and easy setup will make the process of bottling your wine much more pleasant and enjoyable. It also pays to find a bottle filler that can fill multiple bottles at the same time in order to reduce the amount of time you spend bottling.

By avoiding these common mistakes involved with bottle filling, your wine will be enjoyable to drink for months and years to come.