

A Glass Act

By *Carol McGarvey*

Using the right glassware can make all the difference in taste.

Sip your wine from a plastic cup on your deck this summer, if you must. But to get the best taste and aroma, select the proper glassware, say the experts.

“Honestly, I became a true convert after we offered a class here at the store,” says Andrea McGinness, owner of Wine Styles at the West Glen shopping area in West Des Moines. “Before that, I drank wine out of any sort of glass.”

What she found out from representatives of Riedel Crystal, the largest wine glassware maker, is that the glassware shape makes a huge difference in the way you appreciate wine. The shape directs the flow of the wine and, therefore, where it touches the various “taste zones” of the tongue.

The first point of contact depends on the shape and volume of the glass, the diameter of the rim, and its finish (cut and polished, or a rolled edge), along with the thickness of the crystal. Wine is composed of different elements – fruit, acidity, mineral components, tannin, and alcohol. The shape of the glass determines how the wine hits the areas of the tongue that are more receptive to the tastes of bitter, acid, salt, and sweet.

General rules

There are some general wine stemware guidelines:

- For white wine glasses, select glasses 8 to 14 ounces in size. To serve, only fill to one-third capacity. The bowl of the glass should taper inward slightly at the top, which helps direct the aroma inward toward the nose.
- For red wines, choose 10- to 16-ounce glasses, with a rounder bowl than the one for whites. It should taper inward at the top, which focuses the aroma. Older reds have more complex aromas, which you don’t want to squander by too much exposure.
- For sparkling wines, including champagne, choose tall, tapered tulip flutes, designed to keep the bubbles active.
- Thin glasses are preferable to thick ones, because they have less effect on the wine’s temperature.
- All purpose designs with generous bowl and slender stems are suitable for use with reds or whites. The balloon shape offers enough surface space for aerating red wines, and its curve protects the delicate attributes of white ones.

Glassware’s history

Special wine glasses have been used since ancient times, when gold and silver drinking vessels were replaced by glass ones, as shown in some paintings. By the end of the 18th Century, crystal wine glasses were produced in France. By the 19th Century, sets of glassware were produced – often a dozen each of port and sherry, burgundy and claret, champagne glasses, and liqueur glasses. In the 1950s, specific sizes and shapes were introduced for many wine varieties –burgundy, chardonnay, chianti, syrah, and others.

Stemless Glasses

While historically it has been important to have stemmed glasses so that heat from your hand wouldn't warm the bowl and, therefore, the wine, a solid new trend has emerged in wine ware. The so-called "O" glasses, developed by Riedel, have the same shapes as other wine glasses for specific uses, but no stems.

According to Angie Elliott, Riedel representative based at Johnson Brothers in Des Moines, a wine wholesaler, the reason is practical. "When Maximilian Riedel, son of Georg Riedel, director of the company, moved to the United States to become CEO of Riedel Crystal of America, he determined that he needed glassware that stacked and was dishwasher-friendly," Angie explains. "He figured others felt the same way."

Others did, to be sure. When Larry James Jr. opened the Mars Café in the dogtown area around Drake University in Des Moines, he opted to go with "O" glasses primarily. "The glasses are casual, yet elegant, and customers enjoying holding them. We do have stemmed glasses available for ports and some sparkling wines, but people feel as if they're holding a nice design element," he says. "Besides, in a restaurant, there is so much breakage. Glasses without stems don't break as often in the dishwasher or on shelves."

On the table

Where do you place wine glasses for an elegant dinner party? When there's a different wine for each course, have a wine glass for each wine. Arrange them in order they are to be used from right to left. Wine is traditionally poured from the right, while food is served from the left. Put the wine goblet slightly to the top right of the dinner plate, then red wine glass and white wine glass in descending order of use.

Editor's Note: Tried and true and ISO approved.

The classic tulip can handle all the reds and whites you can pour into it. The International Organization for Standardization has approved it for wine tasting.

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