



Mendocino County's AVAs

Although [Mendocino](#) is one of the largest wine-producing counties in California (2.4 million acres), the area planted with wine grapes (17470 acres) represents only about 0.8% of the total County area. The diversity of the growing conditions leads to numerous winegrowing regions, each with a distinct personality, unique topography and twelve of these regions are approved American Viticultural Areas (AVAs).

Red grapes represent the majority of the Mendocino grape acreage, the most widely planted are Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Merlot and Syrah but other common varietals are Petite Sirah, Carignane, Grenache, Sangiovese and Barbera. Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are the most popular white grapes followed by Gewurztraminer, Viognier and Pinot Gris. This wide array of grapes favors the production of a broad range of wine styles, including sparkling wines of exceptional quality.

Anderson Valley

Anderson Valley now ranks with the top Pinot Noir regions in North America. While production is not huge, quality is soaring, as rising-star winemakers join home grown stalwarts in producing sleek, powerful Pinots. Cutting laterally through the coastal range rather than lying between ridges, the west or "deep end" of the Anderson Valley is only a few miles from the cold Pacific Ocean, while the town of Boonville is some 20 miles to the east. Such unique geography results in a wide diurnal range, with daily high and low temperatures occasionally diverging 40 or 50 degrees. This enables Pinot Noir growers to keep acid development in line with sugar and flavor formation through long, warm Indian summers. It also makes for superb Gewurztraminer and Riesling, giving rise to the valley's annual Alsatian festival. In eastern and ridge-top sites there is plenty of warmth to ripen Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Then there's sparkling wine. With several methode champenoise sparkling houses, Anderson Valley is bubbly paradise. The typical vineyard size in Anderson Valley is 27 acres and the region was recognized as AVA in September 1983.

Cole Ranch

The Cole Ranch AVA has the distinction of being North America's smallest appellation. This isolated AVA of less than one quarter square mile sits between the Russian River and Anderson Valley in Mendocino County. Here sixty acres of vines are found tucked into the high hills ranging from 1,400-1,600 feet in

elevation. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Riesling have been traditionally grown here and today, thanks to the new ownership (Mike Lucia of Rootdown Cellars owns the entire vineyard acreage of the appellation) Savoie varieties like Jacquere, Savagnin and Mondeuse are also finding their place at Cole Ranch.

Covelo

The Covelo AVA is located about 45 miles north of Ukiah and encompasses Round Valley, Williams Valley, and the surrounding foothills. The bowl-shaped basin of Round Valley is distinctly different from the long, narrow valleys more commonly found in Mendocino County. In addition, the soils are very deep loam. The high peaks surrounding the region effectively block any coastal influence, providing the Covelo AVA with a continental climate. The growing season here is shorter than other Mendocino growing areas such as Anderson Valley and the Yorkville Highlands, but the warmer daytime temperatures provide optimum opportunity for ripening.

Dos Rios

The Dos Rios appellation is the brainchild of Ralph Carter, a dedicated and passionate terroir advocate, who also penned the petition for the equally secluded Covelo AVA. A study of his work Carter's work reveals that the climate and soil conditions of Dos Rios are remarkably different from other Mendocino County growing areas. Soils here are very rocky, slopes are steep, and the climate is a unique combination of maritime and continental.

Dos Rios is a lively community, located in the remote wilderness of northern Mendocino County. The area, located at the confluence of the Eel River and Middle Fork of the Eel River, is renowned for its whitewater rafting. The six acres under vine are almost exclusively planted to red varieties such as Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Zinfandel.

Eagle Peak

Eagle Peak Mendocino County takes its name from the nearby Eagle Peak summit and covers a mountainous area situated within California's Coastal Range just west of Redwood Valley AVA. In true Mendocino County fashion, Pinot Noir is king here, making balanced, lush red wines that are quite distinct from those made further south.

The AVA encompasses approximately 120 acres of cultivated vines divided between five producers: Masút Vineyards and Winery, Golden Vineyards, Linholme Vineyards, Three Streams Vineyards and Teran Vineyards. Masút is the sole winery and is owned and run by Jake and Ben Fetzer.

McDowell Valley

The McDowell Valley AVA is a high-sloping bench land that sits up to 1,000 feet above sea level and which obtained appellation status in 1987. Overlooking the Russian River to the west, this charming valley in southeastern Mendocino County covers only 540 acres. The region is slightly cooler than surrounding areas, creating conditions that are ideal for select varieties. The McDowell Valley specializes in Rhone red varieties like Grenache and Syrah, plus Pinot Noir and Zinfandel, some coming from century-old vineyards. White Rhone varieties like Marsanne, Viognier and Grenache Gris plus Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc complement the roster of big flavorful reds.

Mendocino Ridge

The Mendocino Ridge is the only non-contiguous AVA in America. It includes vineyards at elevations of 1200 or more feet within 10 miles of the Pacific Coast. Terrain below that elevation along the Mendocino Coast is regularly blanketed with a cooling fog which lies beneath this appellation's ridge top vineyards. The non-contiguous peaks rise above clouds of fog, seemingly like islands, bringing uninterrupted sunshine to the scattering of small vineyards nestled among a beautiful forest consisting primarily of Coast Redwoods and Douglas Fir trees. The region covers more than a quarter million acres of mountainous land, but just 238 acres of the entire viticultural area are planted, with Pinot Noir representing the most widely planted varietal within the AVA. Originally, Zinfandel was the local specialty with a few pioneering plantings by Italian immigrants dating to the late 1800s when ridge-top vineyards were first cultivated in the area. The legacy of the early mountain vignerons is honored today as Mendocino Ridge is increasingly recognized for producing some of the very best Pinot Noir as well as some of the most distinctive Zinfandel.

Mendocino

Within the Mendocino appellation lies the Anderson Valley AVA as well as a group of smaller AVAs including Cole Ranch, McDowell Valley, Potter Valley, Redwood Valley and Yorkville Highlands. Many small vineyards dot the hills and dales of the rugged region. These legacy vineyards from Mendocino's immigrant past give the region its identity as a home to Zinfandel, Mediterranean red varieties, including Syrah, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Charbono and Grenache. Mendocino's prolific Anderson Valley is home to some of America's most sought-after Alsatian whites, prestige sparkling wines, and Pinot Noir.

Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak (part of this AVA is also in Sonoma)

This AVA lies across the border of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties and received official AVA status in 2011. This AVA is one of the highest elevation grape-growing regions in California with its lowest point at 1,600 feet and highest at 3,000 feet at the mountain's peak, and has grapes growing primarily at 1,800 feet and higher. The total extension of the appellation is 4750 acres, 3034 are in Mendocino County of which 162.25 are planted with grapes. Cabernet Sauvignon is the most widely planted grape accounting for nearly 124 acres, other red varieties found here are Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are the two white grape varieties found in this AVA.

The climatic growing conditions are affected from marine inversion and altitude as the vineyards are found at 1600 feet or higher in order to skip the fog cover, this combination of factors favors cooler days and warmer nights with a longer farming cycle. Vines are planted into shallow rocky volcanic soils (less than three feet deep) focusing their energy into the berry production as they can take advantage of the great drainage.

Potter Valley

Located east of Mendocino's Redwood Valley, the upland Potter Valley AVA sits more than 200 feet higher than its surrounding areas. Great day-night temperature variations separate Potter Valley from other growing areas in Mendocino. Mid-day in this inland valley can be truly hot, but nighttime temperatures plummet. Under such conditions, varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Pinot Noir flourish, developing strong but refined character.

Redwood Valley

Redwood Valley is an upland valley where the climate is cooler than surrounding appellations due to a gap in the coastal ridge which allows cool Pacific air currents to penetrate. These conditions lead to a gradual ripening of fruit that makes Redwood Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Barbera and Petite Sirah refined and complex. The notable red soil of the area also provides character to the wines. The earliest vineyards in Mendocino County were planted here among the ancient redwoods by Italian immigrants. The area gained official appellation status in 1997.

Yorkville Highlands

Yorkville Highlands was approved as an AVA in 1998 because of its distinctive soils and temperatures relative to neighboring Anderson Valley. Yorkville Highlands' rocky soils, with high-gravel content, differ from the loamy, clay soils common to neighboring appellations. These highly porous soils allow for superior water drainage, forcing the roots of vines to dig deep for water. The result is low-vigor vines that yield concentrated fruit. The moderate temperatures of the AVA are suitable for Sauvignon Blanc, but also show great promise for Bordeaux reds like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.