

The Napa Valley Appellation and its Sub-Appellations



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The Diversity of the Napa Valley Appellation

The Napa Valley is what is commonly referred to as an appellation. In the United States, the legal term is American Viticultural Area or AVA and Napa Valley was the first in California designated in 1981. The Napa Valley produces just 4% of California's wine grape harvest and is 1/8th the size of Bordeaux. It enjoys a dry Mediterranean climate which encompasses only 2% of the Earth's surface which translates to great consistency vintage-to-vintage.

Within the Napa Valley AVA, regions have been recognized that possess distinct microclimates and terrain, imprinting recognizable characteristics on the grapes grown there. These AVAs are commonly referred to as sub- or nested-appellations. This great diversity within the Napa Valley allows a wide range of fine wine grapes to grow well here, and provides the winemaker a diverse palette to create from. All to bring consumers an incredible selection of consistent high quality wines from the region.

LOS CARNEROS

Climate: Cool, with marine winds from the San Pablo Bay as well as the Petaluma Gap to the west; high temperatures rarely exceed 80° (27°C)

Elevation: Sea level-700 feet (217 m)

Principal varieties: Pinot Noir, Merlot and Chardonnay

COOMBSVILLE

Climate: Temperate climate moderated by near-proximity to the San Pablo Bay and the influences of marine air

Elevation: Most vineyards are in the 100-500 foot (30-150 m) zone, though a small portion tops 1000 feet (300 m)

Principal varieties: Dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon on the hillsides with Merlot, Chardonnay, Syrah and Pinot Noir in the lower, cooler sites

WILD HORSE VALLEY

Climate: A warmer area well to the east, but still moderated by both altitude and prevailing winds coming off Suisun Bay to the southeast

Elevation: 600-1900 feet (186-589 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay

MOUNT VEEDER

Climate: Cool to moderate, with most vineyards above the fog line, meaning warmer nights and cooler days than on the valley floor; typical summer highs are 85° (30°C)

Elevation: 500-2,600 feet (155-806 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel and Chardonnay

OAK KNOLL DISTRICT OF NAPA VALLEY

Climate: Moderate to cool, with marine air and fog often remaining until late morning; afternoon breezes frequently occur, maintaining slightly cooler temperatures than up-valley; summer temperatures may reach 92° (31.5°C) and drop to around 50° (10°C) at night

Elevation: Sea level-800 feet (244 m)

Principal varieties: Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling

YOUNTVILLE

Climate: Moderate, with cool marine influence and fog contributing to cool summer mornings; the marine breeze keeps afternoons more comfortable than further up-valley; summer peak temperatures may reach 90° (31°C), with night time temperatures dropping into the mid-50s° (13°C)

Elevation: 20-200 feet (6-61 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot

STAGS LEAP DISTRICT

Climate: Moderately warm with afternoon marine winds cooling the warmer air radiating off the bare rocks of Stags Leap and the surrounding hillsides; summer temperatures can reach 100°, but more regularly are in mid-90s° (32-34°C)

Elevation: Sea level-500 feet (155 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sangiovese, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc

ATLAS PEAK

Climate: Cool-mountain influenced with temperatures about 10-15° cooler than the valley floor in summer; above the fog line, there is low day-to-night temperature range, with summer rarely rising above 90° (30°C)

Elevation: 760-2600 feet (232-806 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay

OAKVILLE

Climate: Moderately warm, with temperatures commonly in the mid-90s° (32-34°C) in summer, but affected by night and early morning fog; the east side receives more warm afternoon sun

Elevation: Sea level-500 feet (155 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc

RUTHERFORD

Climate: Moderately warm, still marginally influenced by early morning fog; the western bench area is cooler, with less late afternoon sun, tempered by afternoon marine winds; usual summer peak temperatures are mid-90s° (32-34°C) with a distinct day-to-night temperature fluctuation

Elevation: Sea level-600 feet (186 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Zinfandel

ST. HELENA

Climate: Warm, due to greater protection from western hills, with less fog and wind; the narrowing of the valley floor provides more heat reflection off the hillsides; summer temperatures often peak in the mid-to-high 90s° range (31-35°C)

Elevation: 100-700 feet (31-217 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, Zinfandel and Viognier

SPRING MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

Climate: Cool weather prevails, with a lower day-to-night fluctuation in temperatures

Elevation: 600-2600 feet (186-806 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay and Zinfandel

CHILES VALLEY DISTRICT

Climate: Summer temperatures peak in the mid-80s° (30°C), but due to higher elevation and evening fog, drop to below 50° (10°C)

Elevation: 600-1200 feet (186-372 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc

HOWELL MOUNTAIN

Climate: Slightly warmer and drier overall due to strong afternoon sun influence

Elevation: 600-2600 feet (186-806 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel and Viognier

DIAMOND MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

Climate: Moderately warm temperatures with less fluctuation than the north Napa Valley floor; temperatures in the summer range from 50-90° (10-32°C)

Elevation: 400-2200 feet (130-530 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc

CALISTOGA

Climate: Daytime summer temperatures may peak above 100° (37°C) and fall to low 40s° (7°C) at night, due to cool marine air drawn into the valley from the northwestern hills; cool afternoon and evening breezes continue the process, and on clear nights are assisted by cold air sliding down the mountainsides to the valley floor

Elevation: 300-1200 feet (92-370 m)

Principal varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Syrah and Petite Sirah

