

VIBRANT RIOJA

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D.O.Ca. Rioja: Fact Sheet

Vineyard Area

Situated in north-central Spain about 100 miles south of Bilbao, along the meandering Rio Ebro, D.O.Ca. Rioja comprises a vineyard area of 143,318 acres, roughly the size of the state of Delaware.

Rioja or La Rioja?

Most of **D.O.Ca. Rioja** (the wine region) falls within the borders of the Autonomous Community of **La Rioja** (the municipal region), but almost a third of Rioja's vineyards spill over into the Basque province of Álava (País Vasco) and Navarra.

Climate

Unique to Spain, D.O.Ca. Rioja lies at the confluence of three major climate types: **Atlantic** (cool and wet), **Continental** (hot summers, cold winters), and **Mediterranean** (hot and dry). Though Mediterranean weather tends to dominate, some of the region's best vineyards are subject to the influences of all three. Because microclimate and vintage variation dramatically affect ripeness and quality level, blending is traditional in Rioja, though exceptional vintages can be outstanding.

Topography and Soil Geology

Two mountain ranges – Sierra Cantabria to the north and La Sierra de la Demanda to the south – run relatively parallel to the Ebro's course and protect the region from harsher climactic elements. Rapidly fluctuating elevations and variegated soil geology (iron-rich clays, limestone clays, gravelly river beds, sandy soils) combine with a wide range of micro-climates to create a complex matrix of *terruños*.

Red Grapes

Rioja **tinto** (Red Rioja) is classically a blend of several red varieties, but **tempranillo** is unquestionably king (composing 81% of red varietal plantings). Indigenous to northern Spain, but cultivated successfully all over the country, tempranillo reaches its apex of expression in Rioja, with

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unmatched levels of complexity, finesse, and elegance. **Garnacha tinta** gives Rioja red and rosé blends a boost of fruit and warmth. **Mazuelo**, known elsewhere as carignan, adds acidity and tannin (for longevity) to blends, while **graciano** offers regal color and extraordinary aromatic notes.

White Grapes

Viura is Rioja's predominate white variety used to make crisp, aromatic sipping wines (if fermented in stainless steel without oak aging); round, unctuous whites (if fermented and aged briefly on its lees); and complex, graceful wines (if aged in barrel and bottle for many years). **Malvasia** gives the long-aging style structure and aroma. **Garnacha blanca** has become something of a rarity, while chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, and verdejo recently joined the list of approved grapes.

Subzones

Rioja Alta, which lies largely south of the Ebro and east of Logroño, is the subzone most influenced by the Atlantic and has the most complex soil geology of the three areas, dominated by iron and limestone-rich clays. Many of the area's long-aging wines are made from grapes sourced in the Alta. Rioja Baja is the driest and warmest subzone, with sandy soils, enormous old-vine garnacha plantings, and a largely Mediterranean influence. Rioja Alavesa is composed mainly of limestone deposits and younger sedimentary soils, with an abundance of south-facing vineyards and a mixed climate dominated by Mediterranean influence. Tempranillo thrives here, and wines tend to mature with minimal aging.

Age Designations – Generic D.O.Ca. Rioja

Guarantee of Origin - Minimal oak aging (less than 12 months) or no oak aging at all. Some producers of modern Rioja are opting out of classic age designations in favor of this Rioja seal.

Crianza – An easy drinking style, crianzas tend to emphasize fresh fruit above all else and spend less time in bottle than reservas. Aged for a minimum of two years, with a minimum of two years, one of which must be in oak barrels.

Reserva – Aged for a minimum of 12 months in oak and at least 24 in bottle before release, this is the benchmark Rioja designation and the age category on which most bodegas stake their reputations.

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Gran Reserva – Made only in the best years, aged for a minimum of five years (two years in oak and three in bottle), although many bodegas choose to age them for much longer. Wines of exceptional elegance and finesse, ready to drink upon release.

Red wines

Guarantee of origin



This category guarantees the DOC Rioja origin and the vintage of the wine. These can be white, red or rosé. Generally speaking

these are Young red wines with an attractive deep red to purple colour with a deep, red berry scented smell. This label is also used in a minority of wines which don't suit Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva categories

Crianza



These wines are identified by their cherry red back label. Crianza wines must spend at least two years at the winery before being released and at least one of those years must be spent in oak casks. They are still young, fresh and juicy but with a hint of vanilla and spice to give the wine more complexity. These are wines to be enjoyed on a regular basis, with or without food.

Reserva



These wines are recognised by their deep red back label. They must have at least 3 years' aging between barrel and bottle, with at least one year in barrel. Reserva wines have depth and great character. They often have an explosion of aroma and taste sensations that continue to evolve in the mouth and tend to be deeper in colour than the Gran Reserva with a richer concentration of ripe fruit flavours which evolve gracefully over time.

Gran Reserva



Gran Reservas are identified by a teal blue back label (previously brown red). These wines are only made in the best years, using only the finest red grapes. They must spend five years in the winery of which at least two years are spent in oak casks and three in bottle. These are the classic and often the most traditional Rioja wines and rank amongst the finest in the world.