

WINE SENSE™

for the love of winemaking

Corking

A consistent, cool temperature, optimum humidity and a wine's ability to age all play an important role when storing your wine. Many people however don't realize the importance of corking and cork quality in the wine making process. Often this stage is overlooked, but shortcuts can lead to problems down the road such as leaking bottles and spoiled wine. Don't let this happen to you. A knowledge of corks and corking practices can prevent this from happening.

Cork is a natural product made from the cork oak tree (*Quercus Suber*), indigenous to Portugal, Spain, Algeria and Morocco. Sheets of bark are steamed flat, pressed and the corks are drilled with hollow drills. Like other plant products, cork bark tends to vary in thickness, hardness and texture. As a result, there are corks of several different lengths and degrees of quality. Adding to this the explosion in popularity of wine making in recent years, cork producers can't meet the demand for natural cork. Due to this demand cork producers have turned to alternatives. As a result, the home wine maker has a wide range of corks to choose from.

1. Colmated Corks- Colmated or filled corks are essentially natural corks of lesser quality rejected during processing due to imperfections such as holes, cracks etc. The imperfections are filled with cork dust and food grade glue. The resulting corks have an uneven surface which can result in leaking bottles. Colmated corks also have a tendency to tear apart when removing with a corkscrew. As a result of these deficiencies Wine Sense does not carry Colmated corks.

2. Agglomerate Corks- A quality agglomerate cork provides the best value for the home wine maker. Agglomerate corks are made from particles of cork which are pressed and bonded together. As a result you get a cork with a perfectly uniform surface that will not leak. Again you must be aware of differences in quality, if the particles are too small the cork has too much glue and will not be flexible. Wine Sense uses the DCK Agglomerate cork. This cork is used in commercial wines and is of top quality.

3. Nomacorc- In their desire to provide consumers with better closures for their wines, commercial wineries are moving towards synthetic corks. Wine Sense is pleased to carry Nomacorc- the synthetic cork of choice for many commercial wineries. Nomacorc offers a zero failure rate compared to natural corks, they never fall apart when you pull them and do not require the bottle to be store on its side.

Cork Size- Wine Sense recommends the #9 cork for use in almost all wine bottles. When choosing your cork you must also consider length. With Agglomerate corks, if you are planning on storing your wine for more than a year you should use an "extra long" cork; any wine stored less than a year requires only a regular length cork.

Cork Preparation- Over the years the recommendation of cork preparation has changed greatly. The good news is that it gets easier! No more soaking, sterilizing or boiling. A good quality cork will insert fine with any floor corks, without any preparation. A hand corkscrew may require you to wet (not soak) the cork for easier insertion. Be sure to let your bottles stand for three days to allow the air that is compressed by the insertion of the cork to escape. It is then safe to lay the bottles on their sides. Nomacorc may be stored upright.

Extensive testing by Winexpert has shown that the porosity of a cork makes it impossible to sanitize them. Using sulfites can cause a sulfur odour when opening your wine. Soaking a cork only causes the cork to release "corky" water into the wine when compressed by the corkscrew, potentially causing instant damage to your wine. Modern and reputable cork manufacturers sanitize and treat corks at time of production, meaning less work for you.

Use quality corks and follow these tips and you should have no problem corking your wine. Remember, if you lose just one bottle of wine to the failure of a bargain cork, the cost of that bottle would more than pay for the difference in price for better corks.

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