

## Discover Wineries on Wisconsin's Beautiful West Coast

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Senator Kathleen Vinehout writes about Wisconsin wineries along **the Mississippi River and western Wisconsin**. She shares her discussion with a winemaker about the unique grapes from which many of the wines are produced. She also mentions the **Great River Road Wine Trail** which includes many Wisconsin winery members.

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LA CROSSE - "Wisconsin has wineries?" the Chicago woman asked guests at a local bed and breakfast who shared their plans for touring.

Yes, Wisconsin has wineries – over 70 – and growing.

Many of the state's wineries are located in the Upper Mississippi River American Viniculture Area. This federal designation covers the region from Galena, Illinois to the Twin Cities and extends 40 miles on either side of the Mississippi River. Grapes grown in this area have a unique flavor because of the microclimate and soils along the river.

I recently spoke with Dave Danzinger, owner/operator of Danzinger Vineyards perched atop the beautiful Alma Bluffs. "We are farmers," Dave told me. "So we started with the grapes."

About 15 years ago the University of Minnesota started releasing varieties of winter hardy grapes. Breeders at the university crossed German and French grape varieties with wild grapes growing in the north woods. Dave explained that French grapes are only hardy to 15 degrees

Fahrenheit and German grapes are hardy to zero. But the new varieties are hardy to -40F!

The Minnesota researchers named some of the new varieties for the Mississippi River region: Frontenac, St. Pepin, La Crosse, La Crescent, and St. Croix. Because of the wild grape parent, these grapes are a little tarter. "They make a good sweet wine, more toward the Concord grape," Dave said. "Before these grapes, the only variety that could take the cold was the Concord." With development of the hardier grapes, new opportunities opened up for Wisconsin winemakers.

Just along the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River there are 14 wineries from La Crosse to Prescott.

Danzinger Vineyards has 18 acres of grapes under cultivation - making it one of Wisconsin's largest at one site. So many grapes are produced that they sell grapes to other winemakers. In February Danzinger's was named Wisconsin Winery of the Year. The recognition was in part because the vineyard won so many medals at the Wisconsin State Fair. Dave and his crew were also recognized for hosting educational meetings and helping other vineyards get started.

There are three types of wineries. Some winemakers grow no grapes. Other winemakers buy 80% of their fruit. Still others, like Danzinger's, grow their own grapes and use only Wisconsin fruit. Because of this difference, states like Iowa have a labeling program that identifies Iowa wine grown and produced in that state. Minnesota has a Farmstead Winery law that requires 70% of fruit from that state. No such laws exist in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Winery Association advocates for laws to help wineries. This year state winemakers sought a law change to allow wineries to serve alcohol until midnight – making it easier to host events like wedding receptions. The bill passed unanimously out of the Senate Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism Committee, upon which I serve. But it failed to pass the full Senate and Assembly. The group seeks to reintroduce the bill next year.

Following the Great River Road Wine Trail is a wonderful way to visit the outstanding wineries on Wisconsin's beautiful West Coast. Over half of the members are Wisconsin wineries: Valley Vineyard is a new winery nestled in the St. Croix River Valley near Prescott. Maiden Rock Winery and Cidery specializes in artisanal ciders from authentic cider apples grown in

Wisconsin. Villa Bellezza in Pepin has a collection of charming buildings and a central square that leaves you feeling like you've slipped into a small Italian village. Just down river is Danzinger's winery 500 feet above the Mississippi near Alma. Head to Fountain City and Seven Hawks Vineyard with a tasting room and wine bar located in a renovated 1870s river town building. Elmaro Vineyards, located near historic Trempealeau, offers a beautiful rural setting in which to enjoy a glass of Wisconsin wine.

The 31st Senate District is home to 5 other outstanding wineries that offer unique and exceptional Wisconsin wines and spirits in fantastic settings: Brambleberry Winery in Taylor, Tenba Ridge Winery in Blair, Sandstone Ridge Winery near Osseo, and Infinity Beverage Artisan Winery and Distillery and Cap & Corks Winery in Eau Claire.

Take time to enjoy the fruits of the labor of our fantastic Wisconsin winemakers. To learn more, visit [www.wiswine.com](http://www.wiswine.com)

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