Canada

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In a nutshell: Icewine and increasingly successful whites and even reds.
Main grapes: The usual suspects plus such acceptable hybrids as Vidal and Marechal Foch.

Canadians are extremely proud of their wine industry (or rather their wine industries, because 2,500 miles divide those of Ontario in the east and British Columbia in the west), and quite rightly. Perhaps the most famous products of Canada's icy winters, vying with maple syrup, are her ice wines, deliciously refreshing yet sweet liquids made from lightly pressed grapes that were frozen on the vine. Unlike the Germans, Canadians can still be fairly sure of making these every year, usually from Riesling or the hybrid Vidal (which has no foxy characteristics and can taste very pure and refreshing for its first two or three years in bottle), although global warming is affecting the total quantity made. Icewine is so important to Canadian wine that Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc and even sparkling Icewines are made and have enjoyed great export success, particularly in Japan.

Many of Ontario's vineyards are still planted with Concord and American and French hybrids to maximise the chances of ripening grapes before winter sets in but the proportion of European varieties has increased considerably and Canada can make some fine Chardonnay and Pinot Noir - as well as many a respectable Baco and Marechal Foch. This is not just because the planet seems to be warming up, but because growers are ever more quality-conscious on the Niagara Peninsula just west of the Niagara Falls between the Lakes Ontario and Erie where viticulture is most concentrated. Here, as in New York's Finger Lakes region, vine growers benefit from the so-called 'lake effect' where these large bodies of water delay the onset of spring, protecting young buds from frost damage, and prolong the warmth of summer (which can be quite hot here), allowing grapes to reach full ripeness before temperatures plunge. Niagara's many ambitious wine producers are particularly keen to show the world they can ripen even Cabernets here – though Cabernet Franc has been so far a safer bet than Cabernet Sauvignon, and some added Merlot flesh usually helps fill in the mid palate, as Henry of Pelham demonstrate eloquently. Some producers, particularly the trailblazing Inniskillin, owned by Canada's dominant wine company, now American-owned, are betting more heavily on Pinot Noir, as is the joint venture with Boisset of Burgundy, Le Clos Jordanne . Chardonnays are of course made in profusion, with one producer, Deborah Paskus, even managing an almost Montrachet-like weight. She, and others, are busy developing a new wine region in Prince Edward County, notably at limestone-rich Closson Chase.But as in the Finger Lakes region not too far south over the border, the variety that seems most at home in these conditions is Riesling, which can make some very fine dry wines here as well as the famous Icewine which has a vivacity and clarity, if not longevity, rare in German Eiswein. Although vinifera vines enjoy hugely more cachet with consumers, some fine wines are occasoinally made from hybrids such as Marechal Foch.

Conditions in British Columbia are quite different, even if the long winter is also the main enemy, in this case also fought with a lake, the deep finger of Lake Okanagan three hours' drive inland from Vancouver. The Okanagan Valley is very dry – irrigation is as essential here as in Washington state's wine country to the south – but the cool nights that follow each hot summer day are good at fixing acidity and bright flavours in the all-vinifera vineyards here. The result is some very clearly defined white wines and some very determined red wine-making with perhaps the most interesting and distinctive wines so far being made from various Pinots, especially Pinot Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc. New producers are emerging by the minute here, in a wine region that already has more than half as much vineyard as the state of Oregon, but some of my favourites include Blue Mountain, Mission Hill's top bottlings and Tantalus Riesling.

A little wine is also produced in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

The initials VQA on a bottle signal that all the grapes that went into it were grown in Canada.

See Quebec Wines for more information on wine in Quebec.