



Written by
Guest contributor
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Bordeaux 2016 - quality and quantity



Gavin Quinney of Ch Bauduc in the Entre-Deux-Mers continues the story of this year's Bordeaux harvest.

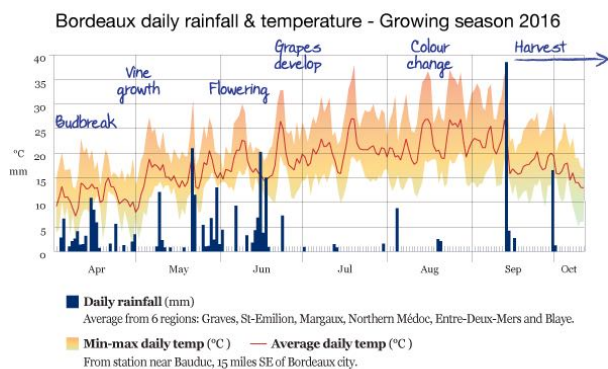
Nature has been kind to Bordeaux this year. A bumper crop for many, and a fine harvest - so far. It may be over for some growers in this vast region but there are plenty of bunches still out there, as numerous châteaux hold on waiting for the later-ripening Cabernets and the last Merlots from cooler soils.

There has been no rush, no panic, to bring in the grapes. After the **bone-dry summer**, the vines enjoyed some **overdue refreshment** thanks to heavy rain on the night of 13 September. It cleared up soon afterwards and, since then, we've had dry and sunny weather for the build-up to the harvest - and for the picking itself - with just one more night of rain on Friday 30 September during a crucial four-week period.

Most importantly, given that we're now well into October, there has been no pressure from grey rot on the reds at all. At least, none that I've seen in the last fortnight, from St-Émilion to St-Estèphe, and this has given growers and winemakers more breathing space with regard to which parcels to pick and when.

Without wanting to jump to conclusions about the vintage while the grapes are still rolling off the sorting tables, it's fair to say that there's quality and quantity in Bordeaux in 2016. Here's what we do know:

- Bordeaux had a wet spring, which proved to be helpful given the drought that was to follow.
- Only a few unfortunate vineyards were hit by the late April frosts that so adversely affected the size of the crop *elsewhere in France*.
- Most vineyards - though not all - managed to avoid problems with mildew during the damp weather in May and June.
- Courtesy of excellent weather during the flowering in the previous vintage - or even the two previous vintages - the vines produced plenty of potential bunches in 2016: *une belle sortie*.
- The flowering in early June this year was remarkably successful, especially on the Merlot, given that the weather was pretty mixed. (See daily rainfall chart below.)
- We had almost 12 weeks of glorious summer weather - for holidaymakers - from 23 June to 13 September, when many areas of Bordeaux saw only a tenth of the normal rainfall.
- Young vines on dry, porous ground suffered in the drought and the heat. There won't be much grand vin produced from the tiny grapes from those poor things. Not this year.
- Some estates, as is often the norm, cut back the crop with successive green harvests, notably on the Merlot. Most vineyards in the so-called lesser appellations don't do this. And can't afford to.
- Two nights of rain on 13 and 30 September accounted for most of the month's rainfall. Far better this than multiple days of drizzly weather during the harvest.



Source: @GavinQuinney

- The amount of rain on 13 and 30 September varied for each region: Margaux (50 mm/2 in on 13 Sept, 8 mm/0.3 in on 30 Sept), Northern Médoc (32 and 15 at Bégadan), Léognan (47 and 28), St-Émilion (32 and 10), Blaye (43 and 9) and Entre-Deux-Mers (50 and 35 at Haux).
- The dry whites were harvested in September in fine weather. Picking dates varied considerably, even in the same appellations. Most growers are reportedly extremely happy with their yields. (Given the drought, where did all the juice come from?)
- The Merlot harvest began in September, with some of the action taking place in the last week of the month but most of it - across the region as a whole - in the first week and a half of October.
- Several estates in the Médoc began picking their Cabernet Sauvignon in the first week of October, while others waited until this week, from Monday 10 October onwards.

Bordeaux rain comparison 2005 & 2009-2016

	2005	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	30yr avg
Mar	30	36	62	33	22	63	76	38	99	64
Apr	102	109	24	10	179	55	67	51	66	76
May	17	80	45	17	44	110	70	38	90	78
Jun	30	55	76	38	86	133	83	52	82	61
Jul	18	55	20	60	32	51	83	22	5	50
Aug	29	37	17	76	14	44	62	103	14	57
Sep	78	48	34	36	63	70	32	49	62	83
Oct	92	38*	62*	40*	97	43	61	62	1**	92
Apr-Oct total	366	383	215	237	515	506	458	375	-	497

Each month's figure is the average in mm of six regions: Graves, St-Émilion, Haut-Médoc (centre), Northern Médoc, Entre-Deux-Mers and Blaye, except * (local station EDM), ** to 11 Oct.

Source: @GavinQuinney

- October has, so far, been dry. We've had mostly sunny days, no rain and with properly chilly mornings from 5 October.
- 2016 is a later harvest and in keeping, in terms of timing, with what they call 'classic' Bordeaux vintages. Cumulative temperature comparisons put 2016 on a (lateness) par with 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014, oddly enough.

It would be wrong, given what I've seen, to make assumptions about who picked what and when, and to question whether they did the right thing. I have, though, been surprised to see that some estates decided to harvest certain blocks, while others waited to pick their vines nearby. Each, as they say, to their own.

It's the third year in a row - 2014, 2015 and now 2016 - when there's been minimal rot on the reds, in contrast to the 'challenging' 2013 harvest. There was also pressure, at the time, to pick both the 2011 reds and the 2012s (both good but not great vintages) towards the end of those harvests as rot started to take hold. Other vintages with minimal or no rot? 2000, 2005, 2009 and 2010.



The yield on the Merlot, prior to those 'green harvests' mentioned above, is the biggest I've seen since 2004 and the quality is far superior to that attractive but uneven vintage. As Bordeaux is 89% red and Merlot accounts for two-thirds of that 89%, it'll be a big crop out in the sticks. (The maximum yields were set last month at between 5,000 and 5,800 litres per hectare for red, depending on the appellation.)

Yields on the Cabernet Sauvignon are lower than for the Merlot, and the harvest is far from finished. As so much of the reputation of the vintage will be based on the great estates of the Médoc and their Cabernets, there's still so much to play for in the next few days.

I'll report back on what we might expect from the wines - there's no lack of colour on the reds,

that's for sure - and what some of the key players make of it all.

Gavin's pictures show Alexandre Thienpont looking pretty happy with quality at Vieux Château Certan, even if his yields are 20% down on 2015, and, top right, 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon grapes at Ch Mouton Rothschild.