

## *Practice makes perfect identifying flavors*

By Dave Preston – Guru of the Goodlife®

**H**ere's a bit of common scents: Smell is important to the wine taster. Much of what we think is taste really comes through our noses. If you don't believe this, try to enjoy a wine - or a meal - the next time you have a bad head cold.

When it comes to smelling, humans take a distant second place to our dogs and cats. Still, we can train our sense of smell, and you don't have to be an expert wine taster to learn to sniff out the differences among wines.

When new wine enthusiasts read wine-tasting notes, they're often puzzled by references to a fruit bowl full of aroma descriptions: Apples, pears, blackberries and melons, oh my, not to mention such un-fruity characteristics as chocolate, coffee, vanilla and warm spice.

I frequently get questions from wine new-bees wondering whether wineries actually add fruit flavors to wine to provide this complex and tasty mix. Answer: No, never, no way ... at least not in the realm of fine wines, although a few "pop" wine-like beverages such as Wild Vines and Arbor Mist do offer low-alcohol beverages that mix fruit juices and wine.

The real stuff, though, is made from 100 percent wine grapes, and that's what makes wine such an intriguing beverage: Fine grapes, fermented and aged in oak barrels or stainless vats, influenced by the taste of the land and the skill of the wine maker's hand, pour from the bottle with complex, intriguing aromas and flavors that you just don't find in Coca-Cola, iced tea or fruit juice.

With the understanding that these are generalizations with many exceptions, let's look at a few specific examples of aromas commonly associated with popular wine-grape varieties.

The aroma of Cabernet Sauvignon, for example, is classically associated with "cassis," or black currant liqueur, sometimes with back notes of cedar (in Bordeaux) or eucalyptus (in Northern California). Some add hints of green olives, green peppers, tobacco leaves or grass. Extended bottle aging may lend a toasty quality and impart earthy scents as variable as mushrooms, old leather, roses and wildflowers.

Merlot, often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon, typically presents an aroma of black cherries on its own. West Coast Merlots aged in new oak barrels may add hints of chocolate and vanilla, creating a wine that almost gives the impression of a sundae in a wine glass.

Zinfandel's trademark scent is raspberry and blackberry. Pinot Noir at its best can be so complex as to defy definition, but the list starts with cherries and subtle, pleasant hints of earth, roses and spice, with a texture that invites comparison to velvet.

A fragrant floral scent of freshly ground black pepper signals Syrah, the No. 1 grape of the Northern Rhone valley in France.

Chardonnay in its natural state recalls crisp, ripe apples, figs, pineapple and tropical fruits. It may add rich notes of butter or coconut if it's aged in oak.

Riesling, the king of German grapes, starts with apples, too, adding elements of mango, pine and even citrus fruit.

Sauvignon Blanc may be grassy and herbal or citric and grapefruity, depending on the amount of sunlight it receives in the vineyard.

Chenin Blanc evokes melons, sometimes with a touch of orange blossom. A sultry smell of peaches identifies Muscat; the hard-to-pronounce Gewurztraminer shows aromas of grapefruit and Chinese litchee nuts.

The more you try to discover the flavors in wine, the more enjoyable it becomes. And it takes practice, patience and asking some one with experience to help you on this adventure! Bon appetite! Carpe Diem my friends and make it a point to go out and live the goodlife!