The Beginner’s Guide to
Getting Started with Wine Making

By

Matt Williams
Winemaker’s Academy

Read this guide and you’ll discover:

1. Where to Start
2. How to Pick Out a Wine Kit
3. The Importance of Quality and Price
4. What Wine Making Equipment You'll Need
5. 5 Features of a Good Wine Making Setup
6. 7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

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Dear Future Winemaker,

Getting started with wine making can be intimidating. Why? Because there are so many decisions to make, mistakes to avoid, and conflicting ideas circulating around the web. It’s hard to know where to begin.

By reading this guide and you’ll discover:

- Where to Start
- How to Pick Out a Wine Kit
- The Importance of Quality and Price
- What Wine Making Equipment You'll Need
- 5 Features of a Good Wine Making Setup
- 7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

I wrote this guide to help you better understand how and where to begin your wine making adventure. With the information in this guide you'll be able to make informed intelligent decisions about what to buy and how to get going. You'll also know how to avoid many frustrating and discouraging mistakes.

I've dedicated Winemaker's Academy to educating new winemakers like yourself. If you have any questions about getting started please email me at Matt@WinemakersAcademy.com. I'll be glad to help out in any way I can.

Cheers!

Matt Williams
Winemaker's Academy

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# Table of Contents

Where to Start with Making Wine...........................................1

Picking Out a Wine Kit..........................................................2

The Importance of Quality & Price........................................3

Kit Wine Making Equipment.................................................4

5 Features of a Good Wine Making Setup.............................6

7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them.............................8

Thank You...............................................................................13

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Where to Start With Making Wine

We as a society have been making wine for upwards of 6000 years according to some sources. Isn't that amazing! For 6000 years people have been fermenting grapes into that wonderful beverage we call wine.

Throughout all those millennium the process of wine hasn't changed one bit. Sure we've got better equipment, quality control, and a better understanding of how to make quality wine. However, the process itself is the same.

Briefly, wine is made by adding yeast to crushed grapes. The yeast consumes the sugar in the grapes and to say thanks they give off alcohol in addition to carbon dioxide. That's really it.

Today there are three main ways to make wine: using fresh grapes, frozen must, or a wine kit. The easiest and most affordable way to get started is with a wine kit, which is what this guide is all about.

What makes kits so easy?

To start with, the grape juice and additives that come in the kit are all engineered to work together so you'll be making good wine straight out of the gate. As long as you follow the directions and read this guide you'll do well.

Second, the fruit has been harvested, crushed, and chemically balanced for you. This allows you to focus all of your attention on the wine making process.

Once you've mastered the wine making process you can move on to frozen must and then fresh grapes. These are more challenging because they require more chemistry as well as larger equipment due to the minimum quantities you must purchase.

Kits allow you to start small and with minimal equipment. You won't need a grape crusher, press, or large fermentation tanks.
Picking Out a Wine Kit

Frozen must and fresh grapes also require much more aging than wine kits. Red wines from fresh grapes are usually aged three years before consuming and white wines about six months. Wine kits on the other hand usually need about three to six months aging. White wines being ready to consume earliest.

There are several decisions you must make when picking out a wine kit. The first, and most important, is what to make.

It's best to start with your favorite varietal. Kits produce 30 bottles of wine so it's a good idea to make something you know you'll like.

Most wine kits follow the same wine making procedures so one wine isn't necessarily harder to make than another. Notable exceptions are dessert wines because of the fortification process.

Another decision you must make is how long can you wait for your wine to be drinkable. Both red and white wines take about six weeks to make and are best when aged six months or so before consuming them.

Big and bold red wines can continue to mature for up to a year but are still drinkable at six months.

**What Comes in a Wine Kit**

Kits contain grape juice concentrate as well as all the additives you'll need to make your wine. These additives include stabilizing agents, a clarifier, and oak chips depending upon the varietal you choose.

While kits do include a sanitizing agent to clean your equipment with it's still a good idea to pick up some of your own. Kits provide exactly enough to get you through the process without mistakes. So if any spills or you have to re-sanitize anything you'll come up short by the last steps of the process.

The grape juice concentrate that comes in these kits is not the same stuff you can pick up in the freezer isle of the grocery store. Kit concentrate is made from vineyard grown wine grapes that have been pressed and then concentrated. These are the same grapes that go into commercial wineries' wines.

For a closer look at what comes in a typical wine kit check out this video:  [What Comes in a Wine Kit](http://www.WinemakersAcademy.com).
The Importance of Quality and Price

Not all wine kits are created equal and cost is something to consider when you're first getting started. There are plenty of kits for as low as $65 but you can spend as much as $200.

When making wine the quality of the grapes is everything. It doesn't matter if you start with a kit, frozen must, or fresh grapes, quality counts. There is a saying among winemakers that goes like this:

“You can make bad wine from good grapes, but you can't make good wine from bad grapes”

Generally speaking you get what you pay for with kits. More expensive kits come with higher quality grape juice. This isn't to say that lower priced kits won't make a good wine, they will. But you'll get better wine from more expensive kits.

I recommend starting out with an inexpensive kit. It takes the pressure off of you, the first time winemaker, to do everything perfect. You'll be far more relaxed when dealing with $65 worth of wine versus $200.

If you're on a budget (who isn't?) then you'll need to consider the cost of the equipment as well the wine kit. Wine kits do not come with any equipment, only the necessary chemistry. So you'll need to consider the price of equipment and bottles as well.

I got my start with an inexpensive kit not only because I had a budget but also because I was a little intimidated by the idea of “learning the ropes” with a premium kit. With no experience, and without a guide like this, I was too afraid of making a mistake with a high dollar kit.

So it comes down to your personal taste. If you can find a varietal you like in an affordable kit that's a great place to start. On the other hand if you're don't want to mess around with anything less than the best money can buy go for the more expensive kits.

Either way, if you're careful and follow the kit's directions to a “T” you'll be fine.
Wine kits themselves don't include any equipment. They do, however, come with a list of equipment you'll need to get started. Be careful though, the lists are not always complete!

To make sure you've got everything you need before you get started, here's a complete list of the minimum equipment required to get started and what you can expect to pay for it.

### Required Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Equipment</th>
<th>Cost (U.S. Dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wine Kit</td>
<td>65.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrometer</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Gallon Glass Carboy</td>
<td>37.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carboy Plug</td>
<td>1.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.5 Gallon Plastic Fermenter w/ Lid</td>
<td>19.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airlock</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Brush</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Lever Corker</td>
<td>23.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Corks</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racking Cane (3/8&quot; x 30&quot; Long)</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubing (3/8&quot; x 5 ft)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Filler</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubing Clamp</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Scale Thermometer</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine Thief</td>
<td>7.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrometer Test Jar</td>
<td>6.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carboy Brush</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine Whip</td>
<td>8.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28&quot; Spoon</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitizer</td>
<td>10.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium Sorbate*</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottles (12.99 / dozen, 30 required)</td>
<td>25.98</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Additional Equipment (Not Required)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Equipment (Not Required)</th>
<th>Cost (U.S. Dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Titratable Acidity Test Kit</td>
<td>22.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pH Test Strips</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Required Equipment** 251.49

**Total Equipment Price** 280.47

**Price Per Bottle (30 Bottles)** 9.35

*Additional potassium sorbate is needed for aging longer than six months.*
Kit Wine Making Equipment

With this equipment you'll have what you need to get through the entire process. You don't want to find yourself in the middle of something and find out you don't have what you need to continue.

Optionally you may want to pick up some pH test strips and a titratable acidity test kit. The directions don't call for these and you don't really need them. However, you'll need to know how to use these if you decide to move into frozen must or fresh grapes.

To see how all this equipment is used to make wine check out this video on the Equipment Required to Make Wine from a Kit.

Ways to Save Money

One way to save a bit of money is to use plastic carboys. In general they run about half the cost of a glass carboy and will cost less to ship if you buy them online.

The trade off, however, is that plastic carboys can only be used so many times before they must be replaced. Glass carboys can be reused indefinitely. In fact, I've heard of people using carboys upwards of fifty years or more.

Reusing wine bottles is another great way to save money. Because of their weight and how fragile they are shipping them can get costly.

You can save your own bottles, have friends save theirs, or you can ask a local winery, bar, or restaurant to set aside bottles for you. Be sure to leave them a container to use with your phone number with it so they can call when your container is full.

The trade off with reusing bottles is that you'll have to remove the labels. This can be a bit time labor intensive.

Another way to save money is by purchasing equipment in a starter kit. Suppliers will package most of what you need together in an “equipment kit” and cut you a deal for buying it all together. You'll still have to add on a few items though.
5 Features of a Good Wine Making Setup

There are several things you're going to want to have control over wherever you make your wine. Not only can it get messy but there's carbon dioxide, light, and temperature to think about.

Here are 5 things you should look for in a good place to make wine.

1. Temperature Control

The temperature of your wine during fermentation and aging must be kept within a specific range, usually must be between 72 and 75 degrees (F). While aging it's best to store wine at around 56 degrees.

While these ranges are flexible deviating from them does have consequences. Thus working in an area where you can control the temperature us a good idea.

2. Limited Exposure to Light

Sunlight can prematurely age your wine. The UV rays have an effect yes, but so does ambient light. It's best to keep wine in the dark unless you're working with it.

Basements and closets are great places to make kit wines. If you don't have a basement or this area won't work for you consider using something to cover your carboy and bottles. Old jackets or, if you want to get fancy, you can buy carboy blankets.

You can also store your wine in a closet during when you're not working on it. However, this will require you to move it about which can be risky. Also, anything in the closet will take on the smells of fermenting fruit.
5 Features of a Good Wine Making Setup

3. Durable, Washable Work Surfaces

As I mentioned before wine making can get messy. It’s inevitable that a few drops, or more, of wine will get spilled.

With this in mind you’ll want a work area with durable work surfaces and floors. Preferably something you can mop up when you’re done or something you won’t mind getting stains on.

Fermenters and carboys are quite heavy when full so be sure that you have a table that can support your wine properly. Avoid particle board surfaces as these can degrade after getting wet.

4. Good Ventilation

Yeast gives off quite a bit of carbon dioxide during fermentation. This can lead to massive headaches if your work area is not well ventilated. In addition to carbon dioxide fermentation also gives off strong aromas.

During the first stages of fermentation your wine will smell quite magical. By day three, however, it’s starting to take on a much more sinister smell. Sort of like a wet towel that was used to mop up spilled beer and grape juice. So if you’re making wine in a closet be sure to clear out any clothes you plan on wearing.

Remember that your pets need oxygen too! If they live in the basement at night and that’s where you’re making wine be sure they’ve got some fresh air coming in. Or you could let them have a vacation in another part of the house.

5. Access to Running Water and a Drain

There’s a lot of rinsing and sanitizing that needs to be done and having access to a water supply makes this infinitely easier. I know from experience.

My wine making operation is housed in the basement but there’s no sink down there. Every time I get ready to work with my wine I have to cart all my equipment up the stairs, sanitize it all, then take it all back down stairs.

This process is repeated when it’s time to clean up as well. It takes a couple trips each time to do this so having a sink would be a great asset.
7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

Making wine for the first time can be an intimidating. It seems like such a delicate process that can be screwed up at many points along the way. Fear not, it's not as bad as it seems.

Here are seven costly mistakes that beginners often make AND how to avoid them. Reread this as you progress through your first wine and everything will turn out.

1. Not cleaning and sanitizing your equipment.

This is the number one killer of quality wine! There are millions of little yeast and bacteria that live all around us. All it takes is a few of the wrong sort to find their way into your wine.

Yeast thrive in wine must because of all the wonderful sugars and nutrients that abound in grapes. However, there are many strains of yeast and bacteria that are all around us that do not make wine. They make rancid, rotten, decomposing nastiness.

Cleaning is the process of removing dirt and grime while sanitation is the process of removing microorganisms from your equipment. You need to do both every time you touch your wine.

When cleaning your equipment do not use soap. It leaves a film behind that is very difficult to remove completely. Even a little bit left behind can cause off flavors.

To clean your equipment simply run warm water over it and wipe it down with your bare hands or using a clean sponge (soft side only).

When sanitizing use food grade or winemaking sanitizers. One of the best on the market is Star San. A simple dip in the solution and you're good to go. Be careful not to get this stuff on your hands. Wear gloves and watch your eyes.

www.WinemakersAcademy.com | 8
7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

2. Letting your wine get too hot or cold.

Yeast is very sensitive to temperature. If your fermenting wine gets too hot it'll take on “cooked” flavors. Too cold and the yeast will stop chomping away on the sugar and you'll have a stuck fermentation.

There are two different temperature ranges to be cognizant of. First is the temperature range in which the yeast can survive. You definitely don't want to go outside of this range.

Luckily it's a broad range. Many yeasts can tolerate temperatures between 60 and 85 degrees (F). Outside of this and you’re going to have trouble.

The second temperature range to be aware of is the recommended temperature range for your kit. These are often between 72 and 75 degrees (F). While deviating outside of this range won't necessarily kill your yeast it can lead to problems when degassing.

There are heating and cooling products available to control the temperature of your wine. However, these solutions can get expensive so be sure to keep your temperatures within the correct range for your kit.

Your best bet is to record the ambient temperature every day for five days before you intend to make your wine. This way you can be prepared for insulating or cooling your wine should it get out of line. Be sure to record daytime and nighttime temperatures to get an idea of what sort of temperature fluctuations you'll be dealing with.

An easy way to cool your wine is to sit the carboy or fermenter in a tub of cool water and add control the temperature. Heating your wine can be done with insulating covers or blankets. The fermentation process produces heat so keep that in mind when insulating your wine.

3. Racking the Lees with the Wine

Racking is when you siphon your wine from one container into a clean container. The object is to leave behind the dead yeast (also called lees) in the bottom so it doesn't give your wine a funk when it decomposes.

It's really easy to suck up the lees if you've never racked before. This skill takes practice to hone.
Have someone help you the first time you do this. You should hold the racking cane which goes into the container your emptying. That way you can monitor what's going on in the bottom of the container.

Your assistant should hold the other end of the tube that goes into the container you're filling. Their job will be to make sure the wine isn't splashing about and mixing with too much oxygen. Don't try to man both ends of the racking cane and tube the first time around.

When you rack you will be leaving behind an inch or two of wine that'll get thrown out. It's okay. Kits are designed with this in mind. You'll still end up with thirty bottles or so of wine in the end.

If you're brave take a wine glass, dip it in, and grab a sample. Go ahead. Taste it! It won't be great as things are still changing at a rapid pace but it'll give you an idea of where you're going if you take a small sip at each step.

Racking is tricky to get the hang of. To see how to use a racking cane and tube check out this video tutorial I recorded for you: How to Use a Racking Cane.

4. Neglecting Your Airlock

Airlocks are your primary line of defense against unwanted micro-organisms and oxygen entering your wine. This can irreversibly spoil all your wine if something goes wrong.

What should you be looking for?

i. Keep an eye on how the airlock is seated. Make sure it remains securely inserted into the carboy or fermenter lid.

ii. Make sure it stays properly filled with water. Most airlocks have a line on them marking the appropriate level of water.

iii. Watch out for an overactive fermentation. There should be some bubbling but if its foaming out of your airlock things are a little too wild. Check the temperature to make sure it's not too warm.
7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

5. Not Completely Degassing Prior to Bottling

Degassing is the process of removing carbon dioxide that is suspended as a liquid in your wine. It's very important that you degas completely. If you don't, you'll wind up with sparkling wine when you open up your bottles.

With some varieties this may be acceptable. However, a sparkling Zinfandel isn't going to be very pleasant.

Agitating your wine with a degassing tool is the quickest and easiest way to degas small quantities of wine. It takes only a few minutes, if you've maintained the proper fermentation temperature.

Most degassing tools connect to your power drill. Be sure to change the drills direction every so often for extra agitation.

To see if you've degassed completely, grab a sample with your wine thief and fill your hydrometer test jar half way. Place your hand securely over the test jar and shake vigorously for thirty seconds or so. Remove your hand and listen for pressure escaping.

If you're done degassing you won't hear anything. You know you're not quite done when you hear carbon dioxide rush out almost like opening a can of soda.

6. Not Keeping a Detailed Wine Making Log

Just as the captain of a ship will keep a captain's log you should always keep a winemaker's log. There are many reasons for this.

First, should something seem off you'll want to ask for help. Upon asking for help you'll be bombarded with questions regarding temperatures, specific gravity, pH, quantities of additives, etc. To get meaningful help from anyone will require a complete summary of your activities.

Second, if you've got more than one wine in the brew it'll get confusing if you don't keep track of what you've done with each one.
7 Costly Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

Lastly, because wines do need time to age you won't find out until much later if you've created something spectacular. Wouldn't it be nice to have a record of exactly what you did so you can do it again?

To learn more about starting a winemaking log check out 3 Keys to Creating a Useful Winemaking Log.

7. Consuming Your Wine Too Early

All too often I've heard winemakers say that they were so excited to have made a wine that they drank it quickly and gave a lot a way. Only when they reached their last bottle did it have enough time to come into its own.

Give your wine as much time as you can before drinking it. It's hard and having 30 bottles of wine staring at you doesn't help. It's worth it though.

One thing you can do is start with a wine that will be ready to consume quickly. White wines are generally ready to drink in as little as three weeks after bottling.

Once that kit is bottled start a red wine that might take more time to age. This way you've got something ready to drink that will quench your thirst while the red ages to perfection.
Thank You

I hope you've found this guide helpful. At this point you're ready to start shopping for your first kit. If you only get three things from this guide make it these three:

1. Make the types of wine you like to drink.

2. Carefully, meticulously, obsessive-compulsively clean and sanitize every bit wine making equipment you have.

3. Give your finished wine time to mature in the bottle. At least three to six months before you start to consume it in earnest.

If you feel like you could use some additional guidance for your first kit I recommend checking out The Ultimate Guide to Kit Wine Making.

As you just saw wine kits and equipment are expensive and you don't want to leave anything to chance. I made many mistakes when making my first kit as do a lot of first time wine makers. That's why I wrote The Ultimate Guide to Kit Wine Making.

I want to help beginners like you have the best possible wine making experience from your first kit. In this guide I'll walk you through every step of the kit wine making process and explain each one in full detail.

The instructions that come with kits are vague and sometimes confusing. This guide will fill in the blanks, explain what's going on and why you need to do each step. I'll show you how to properly use your equipment and test your wine to know if you're on the right track.

By the end of the book and the end of your first wine kit you'll know exactly how fermentation works and be well on your way to being ready to make wine from fruit. I'll be there with you every step of the way. You can email me as much as you like and I'll make sure all your concerns are addressed.
Considering the cost of getting started with wine making the last thing you want to do is have to pour it out because something went wrong. This guide will give you the knowledge you need to make your first wine with confidence.

*Click here for more information*

Remember, I'm here to help. I want to see you succeed as a winemaker and move on to frozen must and fresh grapes eventually. If you have any questions or just want to tell me how your first kit is coming along send me an email at Matt@WinemakersAcademy.com. I'd love to hear from you.

And thank you for subscribing to the Winemaker's Academy mailing list. Of course you can unsubscribe at any time with no hard feelings but I hope you'll stay. I'll be sharing more great wine making resources with you, some of which is only for my subscribers.

Please feel free to pass this along. If this has been passed to you from a friend of the Academy please consider [signing up for email updates here.](#).

Happy Wine Making!

-Matt Williams

Winemaker’s Academy