

Wine glasses come in hundreds of shapes and sizes, and choosing the right one is more about how you want your wine to taste than how the glass will look on your table.

When my husband and I attended our first wine club meeting a decade ago, we committed a *faux pas* that still brings a fair amount of teasing our way. We showed up with plastic wine glasses. I thought the red-stemmed acrylics were cute as well as practical because they wouldn't break when we transported them back and forth to meetings. As newbie club members, we didn't realize how important glassware is to tasting and understanding wine. Plastic glasses do not enhance the flavors of wine the way glass or crystal does.

If you have ever been to a dinner where both red and white wines were paired with the meal, you've probably noticed two different sizes of stemmed glassware at your place setting. The smaller glass holds white wine because it is served cooler; the red wine can stay at room temperature while consumed. Chances are you'll finish a smaller glass of white wine before it gets too warm, but you can swirl the red for hours and the flavors may get better and better.

But things get much more complicated at a true wine-tasting event where you'll see even more various-

shaped glassware. Riedel Crystal, the wine glass many connoisseurs aspire to own, offers more than 300 shapes of glasses for wines and spirits. The 300-year-old Austrian company was the first to design functional shapes to improve the character and flavors of wines.

Robert Parker of *The Wine Advocate* told *Time* magazine a few years ago that the Riedel family "has done more to enhance the oenophile's pleasure than almost any winemaking dynasty."

When we match shapes and sizes of glasses with different varietals, wine drinking becomes

much more enjoyable. It is easier to distinguish the flavors and nuances of a particular wine when it is served in the proper glass.

Riedel glasses, as well as many other less expensive versions, have slightly different shapes that do, in fact, enhance each particular type of wine. For instance, red wine glasses are fuller and rounder so that you can swirl the wines to release the flavor and to detect the aroma. The Bordeaux glass, which is the tallest, allows wine to flow easier to the back of your mouth to maximize flavors. White wine glasses are generally more u-shaped so that aromas are released, yet the smaller bowl keeps the wine cooler.

To see just how glassware affects the taste of wine, I poured a 2005 *Writers Block* Zinfandel by

Cline (about \$20) side-by-side in a large Bordeaux glass, a thick-crystal Burgundy glass, a stemless "O" glass, and a small U-shaped wine glass — the type often given free at wine tasting events. I later tried the same experiment with a \$10 *Apothic Red* cabernet sauvignon.

The wine in the large Bordeaux glass tasted smoother almost immediately because the larger surface area allowed it to breathe more. The wine in the smaller glasses tasted slightly astringent with a lingering taste of alcohol. The wine in the crystal glass eventually smoothed out, but a full 45 minutes passed before the wine in the freebie glass was drinkable. It continued to taste astringent with very little nose, which makes me wonder how many times people taste a red wine in those small glasses and dump it without giving the wine a real chance. The wine in the stemless "O" glass was also smooth, and it had the best nose of all four glasses.

Maximilian Josef Riedel, an eleventh generation member of the glassmaking dynasty, designed the "O" stemless glass series for casual wine drinking about 10 years ago. The series has become the fastest selling in Riedel's history, and less-expensive imitations are getting easier to find. After my personal wine glass experiment, I'll be more inclined to use my stemless "O" glasses in the future.

So how many wine glasses do you really need to own? It depends upon how many varietals you serve regularly. According to the website www.basic-wine-knowledge.com, a good rule of thumb is to have both Bordeaux and Burgundy glasses for red wines, smaller U-shaped glasses for whites, flutes for sparkling wines, and small dessert wine glasses.

And save those plastic wine glasses for your next picnic or pool party.

grapes

shapes



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