

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Sipping Earth-Friendly Holiday Cheer

Dear EcoGirl: I'm planning my holiday gatherings and wondering if it really matters if I choose eco-wines. Also, how do I find ones that are tasty and truly benefit the earth? *Signed, Holiday Sipper*

Dear Sipper: Thanks for your great questions. Luckily, I can help! Because one of my self-sworn duties as an eco-writer is to check out our local organic food and wine offerings. Oh, how I suffer! So let's walk through your questions:

1) Does it really matter if you buy an eco-wine? Absolutely! Folks often forget that wine is an agricultural product, just like food. Thus, growing wine grapes ecologically reduces the toxics in both our environment and our glass.

David Steinman, author of *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*, says that mainstream wine "has too many pesticides to qualify as a top-quality product." He reports that multiple pesticide residues have been found in wines at high concentrations, and that wine drinkers report fewer headaches after going organic. (Of course, moderation still counts.)

2) Do quality eco-friendly wines exist? The answer is also an emphatic, Yes! In fact, winemakers often seek ecologically-grown grapes for their flavor.

Veronique Raskin of the Organic Wine Company, a Marin importer, says that she finds "a clear difference" with organic wine. "You feel the essence of the wine, the terroir," she explains. "You have a much stronger experience of the country and the winemaker with organic wines than you do with other wines."

3) OK, so how do you choose wines that are right for you and the planet? Understanding some key words can help.

For instance, what's the difference between "organically-grown" and

"organic" wines? Both are made with grapes grown using certified organic methods, but "organic" wines are also produced according to the organic winemaking standards of each country.

U.S. organic winemaking rules are different in that they disallow not only toxic processing aids but also the pure natural sulfur dioxide preservative permitted in international organic wines. Thus, some U.S. "organic" wines can have a shorter shelf life; ask producers for their storage advice. It also means that you'll find fewer "organic" U.S. wines than "organically-grown" ones.

Another delightful option to consider is biodynamic wine, which has even higher standards than organic and can offer richly dimensional flavors.

However, be careful with two other eco-wine identifiers, "sustainable" and "natural," because neither has a legal definition or regulation. Sometimes such wines use less-toxic growing or processing practices, but the specifics and commitment vary by producer.

4) So what are some of my favorite local eco-wines? My first choice for holiday bubbly is **Jeriko Estate's** award-winning, organically-grown sparkling wine, one of the few from California. Hand-crafted and estate-grown, it tastes charmingly subtle and inspiring. www.jerikoestate.com, 707 744-1140

I've also enjoyed the luscious and complex organically-grown wines of **Frog's Leap Winery**, produced in their 100% solar-operated facility. www.frogslap.com, 707 963-4704, 800 959-4704

Another of my favorite wineries is Napa's **Robert Sinskey Vineyards**. They use estate-sourced grapes that are both organically-grown and biodynamic, and they say that their winemaking is "driven by the fruit, with minimal manipulation." Behind the scenes of their beautifully-dramatic tasting room, solar power helps run their winery,

biodiesel powers their trucks and tractors, and sheep mow their cover crops. www.robertsinskey.com, 707 944-9090, 800 869-2030

Folks wanting a delicious natural wine, with no manipulation or additives including sulfites, can sample **Coturri Winery's** full-bodied organically-grown selections. All are traditionally handcrafted in small lots and bottled by hand in Glen Ellen. www.coturriwinery.com, 707 525-9126

These and other luscious eco-wines are available in local stores or by mail order. Or enjoy a holiday tasting room visit, one benefit of our proximity to wine country.

You can find more eco-holiday ideas on my website. My past columns there can help you choose truly eco-gifts, buy on a budget, and reduce holiday waste. I also invite you to give folks my "insanely useful" Ask EcoGirl booklets, titled *Healthier Housekeeping* and *Detoxing Your Life*. They offer an easy and affordable way to inform and nurture your loved ones. Quantity discounts are available, and all proceeds support my eco-work. And I hope that everyone has the very happiest of holiday seasons!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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