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6. Relative order of maturity by variety

The general harvest date for each variety is known because its biological cycle and behavior over the years in a particular zone are known. In Chile, grapes reach their relative maturity in the following order:

White varieties: sauvignon blanc – chardonnay – riesling – gewürztraminer – semillón – chenin blanc – muscats – torontel

Red varieties: pinot noir – merlot – malbec – cabernet franc – cabernet sauvignon – syrah – carmenere – país

The difference in time between the first and last variety of each list can be as much as two months. Depending on the vegetative cycle of each variety, there are approximately 40 days between veraison and maturity (in chardonnay, for example), and 60 days for others (such as cabernet sauvignon). We also add that the harvest is usually accelerated when:

- *The yield is large*
- *It is a wet year or there is a risk of rain*
- *The year is very hot and the grapes mature early*
- *There is a risk of a labor shortage*

If everything seems normal, it is best to begin the harvest as late as possible, especially in the case of red wines, while bearing in mind that it is always necessary to begin before the grapes are perfectly ripe, or to begin slowly, with few pickers, and then fully activate the harvest when the grapes reach their peak maturity.



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It is one thing, however, to pinpoint the precise moment to begin harvesting and another to be able to logistically manage the process of picking the grapes, transporting them to the winery, and beginning vinification. The period of ideal maturity is short; it can last several days, 6-8 for cabernet sauvignon and syrah, or just 2-4 for merlot and pinot noir. The harvest is a period of tremendous activity, and the only way to handle it efficiently is to prepare for it very carefully ahead of time. If not, there will certainly be a degree of deterioration in the quality of the grapes that will be transmitted to the wine.

This is a matter of programming the harvest activities to guarantee that as many grapes as possible are gathered at their peak of quality and then transported to the winery as fast as possible for vinification. Once picked, the grapes cannot wait in the vineyard or in the winery. The winery itself should be organized, equipped, and technically directed to be ready for the very uncertain process of alcoholic fermentation. Problems with slow or stuck fermentations occur every year in many wineries around the world. The decision of when to harvest is the irreversible stage that joins enology with viticulture.