

# YOUR WINE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

## HOW LONG WILL WINE KEEP IN AN OPEN BOTTLE?

The usual answer to this question is “Not more than half an hour round at our house !” Finishing the bottle certainly ensures you drink the wine while it’s fresh. But for those rare occasions when a night with friends leaves a bottle unfinished, or you’ve had a glass or two on your own, there are alternatives.

Oxygen changes wine. For a few hours after the wine has been opened and poured, the oxygen gets in and ‘releases’ the flavour. This is a good thing. But the oxygen keeps working away and after about 24 hours the taste begins to lose freshness, until weeks later it tastes vinegary.

A normal half-full bottle of wine with a cork or screwcap which is kept in the fridge (reds too) will taste OK for up to three days. ‘OK’ doesn’t mean identical to when it was opened, but nice enough to drink. Wine quality does not turn on and off like a light switch, but changes gradually like the tide. As oxygen gets a grip, the flavours begin to fade and dull, until eventually they die.

The secret to preserving good flavours in an opened bottle is to keep the oxygen out and the temperature down. The more you follow this rule the longer it will last.

## WHAT NOT TO DO

- Don’t leave the top off the bottle at the end of the evening
- Don’t leave the bottle out in the kitchen, living room or any warm place. Heat hastens the chemical process that changes the taste

- Don't keep the bottle on its side. This exposes more surface of the wine to air
- Don't expect as good results from a bottle that is almost empty as one that is almost full. Wine and air are in a zero sum game. Less wine means more air, making it harder to stay fresh.

## FOR BEST RESULTS

Keep the wine in a sealed bottle standing up in the fridge. If your fridge is big enough, keep it on a shelf. If it's in the door, the wine and air slosh around a bit every time it is opened.

For better results, separate the wine from the air altogether. A great method is to pour it into a small empty mineral water bottle. Keep 25cl, 33cl and 50cl rinsed plastic bottles ready and fill them as close to the top as possible, screw the cap on, and put them in the fridge. If the bottles are full the wine will keep for many weeks – as long as it hasn't already been sitting around open by the cooker for ages.

If the wine you have stored in the fridge is red take the chill off it before drinking by standing the bottle in warm water. For quicker results take the top off the bottle, stand it in a bowl, and give it a short spin in the microwave. Short spin means a few seconds not minutes.

If the DIY option doesn't appeal to you, there are several commercial devices that aim to separate wine from oxygen. Vacu Vin pumps the air out and has been around for many years. It works but only for two or three days, much the same as resealing with screwcap or cork, except that the wine quality and fresh flavours should be better preserved.

Private Preserve works by injecting a layer of harmless gas (a mixture of carbon dioxide, nitrogen and argon) that creates a protective layer over the wine. It keeps the wine good for much longer and works on any quantity left in the bottle, even a glassful. One user on the company's website reports a half bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon tasting as good as new after six months. With consistently excellent reviews this seems to be the choice of the moment.

Coravin is a device targeting expensive bottles of wine. It allows you to drink a glass at a time over many months. A medical grade needle pierces the cork and inserts Argon gas into the bottle when wine is poured out. It's far from cheap but apparently works well.

For longer-term storage use the freezer. Put the wine in a plastic mineral water bottle with enough space for it to expand a little. It will keep for many months. Once defrosted the wine should be nice and fresh. If you need to defrost in a hurry carefully use the microwave. Don't be alarmed if you find crystals or a powdery like residue at the bottom of your glass. They are usually removed by the chilling or storage process when wine is made, but may otherwise 'fall out' when the wine is frozen. They are natural and harmless.

If there is only a little wine left in the bottle, fill some ice cube shapes and freeze them. These are good to suck as refreshing wine cubes or to use in sauces.

## BAG-IN-BOX

In Sweden 55% of all wine is sold in Bag-in-Box. In the UK we associate them with the cheapest wines, but the quality has been rising in recent years. A friend of mine has a supermarket Chilean Sauvignon Blanc bag-inbox on tap in her fridge at all times. This is unremarkable until you know that she is a Master of Wine, the top nerd qualification there is in the wine trade. If bag-in-box is good enough for Fiona, it's good enough for me.

A box may not look as attractive as a bottle, but their system of keeping wine fresh is much better. Because the bag has no air in it, the wine lasts for six to eight weeks once opened. Apart from their higher cost and larger size – traditionally 3 litres, the equivalent of 4 bottles, but also 2.25 litres or 3 bottles – I wonder why we don't buy more of them. They have the advantage of being much lighter than glass, and are responsible for fewer carbon dioxide emissions per litre when transported commercially.

I once suggested to our New Product Development team that we design a bag-in-box with a see-through column, making it easy to know how much wine was left inside. The whole group looked at me as though I was from another planet. Then one of them explained that this would reduce rather than increase sales, because many people buy a bag-in-box so their partner doesn't know how much they are drinking.

## CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE

Keeping bubbly alive is different. The only proven method to preserve bubbles and freshness is to use one of the special pressure resisting clip-on Champagne corks. As always, keep the wine in the fridge. In my experience, the next day is good; the one after that is very much touch and go. The old wives' tales don't work. The idea that an upside-down spoon in the bottle neck will preserve the fizz is a dud. Some people get excited by the restorative powers of raisins. They believe dropping two or three into a bottle that has lost its fizz will get the bubbles bouncing again. Others think putting a raisin in a glass before filling it with wine from an overnight bottle works even better.

Alas the joy, if any, is short-lived. The raisin can't create additional bubbles – it's just a raisin – but it can attract the remaining carbon dioxide and then release it. Once the bubbles have been released, the wine is even flatter than before. What does create a show is doing the same when the bubbly is fresh and fizzy. The raisin bobs up and down in the glass as it attracts and then releases the carbon dioxide.

## IN ONE GULP

A partially-empty bottle left open overnight will be losing its freshness by the next morning. Kept in the fridge with the cork or screwcap on it will last for up to 3 days. Transferred to completely fill a small plastic bottle it can last for several weeks.

I hope you enjoyed reading the free chapter. You can buy the book in print or eBook on Amazon from 7th September. If you enjoy it please tell your friends and family, or give it as a gift. 100% of my revenue from sales will be used to fund the building of primary schools in Sierra Leone.

Thank you for your interest

Jerry Lockspeiser