

## Columnists

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### 'Green' beer, wine is mainstream in Washington state

From production to packaging, innovative beer and winemakers throughout the Northwest have reduced their environmental footprint.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

With apologies to the classic old TV ads for light beer ("Great taste. Less filling!"), many beer and wine producers today could make a new ad: "Great taste. Less impact!"

"Green" beer and wine have become so mainstream that you might not even realize when you're drinking it. From production to packaging, innovative beer and winemakers throughout the Northwest have reduced their environmental footprint.

**Q:** What's the first step toward greening up my own beer and wine drinking?

**A:** Drink local. Consuming regionally produced products generally results in lower environmental impact, since less energy is required for shipping. Drinking Northwest-made beer and wine also pours economic benefits into our local communities. Washington state's wine industry employs more than 11,000 people, and King County alone has more than 20 small breweries.

**Q:** What about organic wine and beer? I've heard mixed reviews of organic wine.

**A:** By forgoing synthetic fertilizers and petrochemical pesticides, organic production of food and beverages keeps toxins out of water, soil, air and our bodies.

Many wine buffs love organic wine. However, organic wines certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) may not have as long a shelf life as conventional wines. This is because USDA organic wines cannot have added sulfites, which serve as preservatives.

**Q:** Are there other green options for wine?

**A:** Some connoisseurs prefer wine made from organically grown grapes, which is not USDA-certified but gets around the shelf-life issue. Wines may also be certified "biodynamic," which involves a rigorous organic-based growing process but allows more sulfites. Salmon-Safe ([salmonsafe.org](http://salmonsafe.org)), a green certification for the Northwest, indicates that participating vineyards have taken steps to preserve water quality and biodiversity.

**Q:** How about a couple of examples of green Washington state wines?

**A:** Badger Mountain in Kennewick became the first USDA-certified organic vineyard in Washington in 1990, and also produces noncertified wines made from organic grapes. Wilridge, with a winery in Seattle and vineyard near Yakima, tends its vines organically and biodynamically.

**Q:** What's the story on organic beer?

**A:** Organic beer is made mostly with organically grown ingredients, such as barley, and doesn't have the sulfite concerns of organic wines. Puget Sound-area organic beer producers include Fish Brewing in Olympia, Elliott Bay Brewing in Burien and Pike Brewing in Seattle.

**Q:** Packaging of beverages has such a huge environmental impact. What's the greenest container for beer?

**A:** Let's make a toast to refillable glass bottles. Sadly, standard beer bottles can no longer be returned for refilling in the U.S., but dozens of breweries, retailers and bars in Seattle will take back or refill glass beer jugs called "growlers."

**Q:** Do any wine bottles get refilled?

**A:** A few wineries, such as Wilridge in Seattle, take back selected bottles for refilling.

**Q:** Is it true that wine in a box is greener?

**A:** Wine in boxes or pouches is much more energy-efficient to ship than wine in glass bottles. However, these containers use plastic or foil liners to hold the wine, which is a deal-breaker for some wine drinkers.

**Q:** Can wine and beer bottles be used for anything else?

**A:** Turn old bottles into vases or refill them with homemade beverages. For a more ambitious project, make a distinctive garden-bed border simply by lining up wine bottles upside down, half-buried in the ground.

In 1963, Heineken briefly produced the WOBO (for "world bottle") glass beer bottle, designed to be reused as an interlocking, bricklike building material for homes in developing countries. Unfortunately, it never gained widespread acceptance.

**Q:** What about wine corks?

**A:** Search on Pinterest.com to find zillions of craft projects with corks. Or recycle corks at more than 20 local retailers including PCC Natural Markets and Whole Foods Markets. Check [recork.org](http://recork.org) and for recycling locations.

Making alcoholic beverages more sustainable isn't really about drinking. But if you do enjoy beer or wine occasionally, or serve it to guests, it will go down smoother when you know it's green.

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