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SPIRITS

## [The Big Wine Crush](#)

**Wine-loving friends crush grapes and sip last year's batch.**

by [Paul Moore](#)



## BE A WINE-CRUSHER

### GETTING STARTED

To start your own winemaking group, all you need are interested friends and a computer, according to Roger Reistad. “It’s so easy, with the Internet,” he says. He suggests going online for everything from supplies and how-to books to equipment and grapes. *WineMaker* magazine ([www.winemakermag.com](http://www.winemakermag.com)) includes a state-by-state listing of winemaker clubs.

### EQUIPMENT

While there are plenty of online winemaking equipment suppliers, you can also shop locally. Both Midwest Supplies ([www.midwestsupplies.com](http://www.midwestsupplies.com)) in St. Louis Park and Northern Brewer ([www.northernbrewer.com](http://www.northernbrewer.com)) in St. Paul sell equipment. Northern also offers some items for rental, such as crushers and de-stemmers.

### PRODUCE

Minnesota’s grape-growing industry is mostly confined to hobbyists and backyard growers, so you’ll probably need to get your grapes from California. Oceans of Wine ([www.oceansofwine.com](http://www.oceansofwine.com)) and M&M Wine Grape Co. ([www.juicegrape.com](http://www.juicegrape.com)) offer both grapes and advice.

It’s early fall, and a group of people with divergent backgrounds and tastes is congregating in the North Oaks driveway of Roger Reistad. There’s a big machine off to one side into which people are pouring grapes, while Reistad gathers bottles that bear homemade labels. Some labels are as simple as a piece of masking tape, while others are a bit more artistic, featuring wineries that you most definitely have never heard of.

As you may suspect, this is a winemaking party, but these winemakers are anything but wine connoisseurs. They’re a bunch of friends sharing a hobby.

### UNIFYING POWER OF WINE

“It’s just a great group of people,” says Reistad, who started the group after bringing some homemade wine to a Rotary picnic about five years ago.

“Once Roger brought his, everyone wanted to try making some,” says Joel Lapinski, a retired dentist. “So we said, ‘Let’s do it.’ It’s really a combination of science and art. And it’s not a lot of work, once you get it going.”

The group has grown to more than a dozen people. Some, like Roger’s neighbor Josie Holman, figured it was just the next logical step. “We’d always get together to drink wine, so we thought, why not make our own?” she says. “At first I couldn’t drink ours, but then again, you’re your own worst critic. The fun part is just getting together.”

Doug Drew, a clinical social worker from Ham Lake, has been making his own wine for 25 years, but hooked up with this group just a couple of years ago, through mutual friends. “There’s no reason to do this, except for the fun of it,” he says. “You’re not going to make great wine, and the cost is about the same.”

#### MEMBERSHIP NOT REQUIRED

Because of the nature of the craft, how the wine turns out is a mystery for a full year. At each annual gathering, the winemakers drink their creations from the previous year.

One of the people working the machine that separates the grapes from their stems is rookie vintner Adam Malm, a 24-year-old filling in for his parents, who are out of town. “Their first year was pretty good, so I’m hoping mine will be too,” he says. “This is pretty fun. I’ve always wanted to try making my own.”

Membership in the group is fluid and informal — in other words, pretty much anyone is welcome. And they all have a common reason for coming: no, not the wine, although that does play a starring role. They’re here to socialize and swap tips and stories. “You get to visit about something everyone likes,” says Reistad. “It’s different from a wine tasting or dinner.”

Some of the stories are familiar to the group’s charter members. Like the time Lapinski was heading into Canada and the border patrol asked him if he had anything to declare. “Nope, just homemade wine,” he said. The officer waved him through.

That casual acceptance seems to be a hallmark of amateur winemakers. Of course they’re curious about how each other’s wine turned out and enjoy sampling it. But that’s secondary to enjoying each other’s company.

Enjoy the wine:





















*Photography by Jill Greer.*

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