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Spring Frost Damages Champagne Vineyards

Growers fear a smaller 2026 harvest after an early warm spell left young buds exposed to repeated cold snaps

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Spring frosts are damaging vineyards in Champagne and raising concerns about the 2026 harvest, after an unusually warm start to the season pushed vine growth ahead by about three weeks and left young buds exposed to freezing nights.

Growers in the region said repeated cold snaps in recent weeks have burned tender shoots and, in some cases, destroyed buds outright. Flavien Rutat of Champagne René Rutat said frost had already wiped out grapes from 1 hectare of his 7-hectare holding for the 2026 crop. He said the risk was not over, with more frost possible in May.

The damage matters because Champagne vines are now at a stage when new growth is especially fragile. According to growers, buds and leaves can freeze at -4°C in dry conditions, and at -2°C when the air is damp. That makes even brief overnight drops dangerous after a spring that arrived early and warm.

The region has long used a built-in buffer against frost. Many Champagne producers deliberately allow vines to carry more fruit than they expect to harvest, so that if one parcel is damaged by cold, grapes from less affected land can make up part of the loss. In years without frost, the extra fruit is removed later.

Still, the losses come at a sensitive time for Champagne and other French wine regions that have faced repeated weather shocks in recent years. A smaller crop could tighten supply of sparkling wine later this year and into next, depending on how much additional frost arrives in May and how much of the damaged growth recovers.

The problem is not limited to Champagne. Spring frost has also hit vineyards elsewhere in France, adding pressure on growers already dealing with shifting weather patterns that can bring early bud break followed by sudden cold. In some areas, producers have turned to wind machines, burning hay or other anti-frost methods to protect vines during the most vulnerable nights.

For Champagne growers, the immediate concern is whether the weather will stay mild enough for the remaining buds to survive and whether another cold spell will deepen the damage before flowering begins.