vinetur

Heat and drought threaten France’s wine harvest

Champagne growers expect one of the earliest harvests on record as water stress slows grape growth across major regions.

Tuesday, July 7, 2026



France’s summer heat and drought are slowing grape growth in Champagne, Bordeaux and Burgundy, raising the risk of a smaller wine harvest and pushing picking dates toward one of the earliest starts on record, producers said Tuesday.

The pressure comes after a record-breaking heat wave in late June and another stretch of hot, dry weather since last week. Growers say the lack of water is now the main concern in several of the country’s leading wine regions. Forecasts point to little or no rain before July 14 in the main producing areas, which would extend a dry spell that has already lasted more than three weeks in many places.

France is the world’s second-largest wine producer, so changes in its harvest can ripple beyond vineyards. A smaller crop and an earlier harvest could tighten European wine supply, alter the timing of bulk wine contracts and add pressure to prices if losses deepen later in the season.

In Burgundy, Laurent Delaunay, chairman of the regional wine industry group BIVB, said growers were watching production potential fade under the heat. He said the biggest worry was water stress. Producers in Burgundy and Bordeaux, where the late-June heat wave was especially intense, said it was still too early to give firm production estimates but warned that the decline could be significant.

In Champagne, growers expect what could be the earliest harvest on record, with picking likely to begin around Aug. 15. That is about a month earlier than was common a few decades ago. Maxime Toubart, chairman of the Champagne wine growers union, said current expectations point to grape yields about 10% below last year’s level.

He said overall production may not fall by the same amount because Champagne houses can use reserve stocks. He also noted that a very wet winter had left soils with some moisture at the start of the season, helping vines withstand early summer stress. Even so, he said growers can now see that grapes are no longer increasing in size.

Champagne producers have not ruled out a change in outlook if substantial rain arrives within the next two weeks without storms that could damage vines or fruit. For now, however, dry conditions are shaping expectations across much of the country.

The early timetable is not limited to Champagne. In Bordeaux, the first grapes for crémant sparkling wines are expected to be picked in the first week of August. In Burgundy, initial harvesting is likely around Aug. 20, also well ahead of traditional schedules.

Producers said quality may not necessarily deteriorate because of the heat. But prolonged drought and high temperatures can increase sugar concentration in grapes, which may affect flavor profiles and alcohol levels in finished wines. That matters not only for estate bottlings but also for buyers across the beverage trade who depend on stable volumes and predictable styles for export markets and long-term supply agreements.

The French wine sector has faced repeated weather shocks in recent years, including frost, hail and extreme heat. This season’s concern is less about a single destructive event than about sustained dryness during a key stage of berry development. Younger vines appear especially vulnerable because their root systems are less established.

With several weeks still to go before harvest begins in most regions, growers say rainfall patterns over the rest of July will be critical in determining how much fruit remains on the vine and how far final output falls from current expectations.