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Nyetimber begins its earliest grape harvest on record after England’s hot summer

The sparkling wine producer started picking on Sept. 14, five days before its previous record, following heat and drought.

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England’s wine industry is bringing in grapes earlier than usual in 2026, as a hot and dry summer pushes harvest dates forward in a pattern already seen across major European wine regions.

According to WineNews, citing BBC News, Nyetimber, one of England’s best-known sparkling wine producers, has started what the company says is the earliest harvest in its history. Picking began on Sept. 14 in the vineyards of West Chiltington and Amberley, in southern England. That was five days earlier than the estate’s previous record start date of Sept. 19, 2018.

The company said the early start follows a season marked by extreme heat, drought and unusual weather conditions. The shift adds England to a broader trend affecting vineyards from Italy to France, where climate change has been moving harvests earlier and changing long-established vineyard calendars.

Nyetimber plans to expand picking operations from Sept. 21, when about 500 harvest workers are due to begin work across the company’s 11 vineyards in Kent, West Sussex and Hampshire. The grapes will be picked by hand, with as much as 170 tons collected each day. The company uses manual harvesting to protect the fruit, which is intended for premium sparkling wine production.

Brad Greatrix, Nyetimber’s head of winemaking, said the season has created several risks tied to heat. He said even limited rainfall can become a problem after months of severe dryness because vines absorb available water quickly. That can cause berries to swell and, in some cases, split, increasing the risk of damage and rot. For that reason, he said, sorting in the vineyard will be especially strict, with crews instructed to bring in only the best fruit.

The weather will continue to be closely watched during the coming weeks. Greatrix, who is overseeing his 20th harvest at Nyetimber, said each vintage brings different challenges, but that this year’s extreme conditions have required an unusual level of adjustment. He said late frosts in May initially raised concerns about a major drop in yields. Later in the season, however, summer heat helped the vines recover part of the crop.

The timing of the 2026 harvest marks another clear change for English vineyards. In 2025, Nyetimber began picking on Sept. 24. In more traditional years, harvest work usually started around the middle of October. The difference shows how quickly the production cycle is changing in a country that only recently became a recognized force

in international wine.

Greatrix said warmer summers could create more favorable conditions for still wines in England, especially red wines. At the same time, he said top-quality sparkling wine still depends on the cooler conditions that have long defined English growing areas, including summer temperatures near 20 degrees Celsius and regular rainfall.

Nyetimber expects to produce about 2,500 tons of grapes in the 2026 harvest, a volume that could result in more than 1.5 million bottles of sparkling wine. Chief winemaker Cherie Spriggs described the season as “another unprecedented vintage,” reflecting how often extreme weather is now shaping decisions in vineyards across southern England.