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# Beaujolais nouveau goes on sale after a harvest cut of up to 30%

Producers hope the light red can slow an 8% sales decline after heat waves and hail damaged vineyards across the region

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Beaujolais nouveau went on sale early Thursday, November 19, with producers betting that the wine’s light, fresh profile can help steady demand after another year of falling sales and a sharply smaller harvest.

As is customary on the third Thursday of November, the first barrels were opened at midnight in Beaujeu, in eastern France, the center of the Beaujolais vineyard and host of the Sarmentelles celebration, a five-day festival tied to the release of the young wine. In Lyon, barrels arrived on vintage tractors before young winemakers presented their new cuvées near City Hall during overnight festivities.

The annual launch comes at a difficult time for the region. Beaujolais sales have been falling since the Covid-19 pandemic, dropping by 3% to 5% a year, according to the industry. In 2026, that decline deepened to 8%, even as producers argued that gamay, the grape behind Beaujolais nouveau, still fits consumer interest in fruit-forward, lower-weight wines that are easy to drink.

Sébastien Kargul, president of the Inter Beaujolais trade group, said that style has helped cushion the broader drop in wine consumption. The challenge for producers, however, is not only weaker demand. The 2026 harvest is also expected to be down by 25% to 30%, marking a second straight year of significant losses.

The lower output reflects a string of weather problems that have hit vineyards across France. After two difficult years marked by hail, the summer of 2026 brought repeated heat waves. In some vineyards, temperatures rose above 104 degrees Fahrenheit, or 40 degrees Celsius, concentrating the grapes but reducing volumes.

Winemaker Yannick De Vermont said yields on his younger plots, where root systems were not yet fully established, fell by more than 60%. The harvest in Beaujolais started before mid-August, an unusually early date for the region, which stretches from the outskirts of Lyon to the area around Mâcon on the right bank of the Saône River. The vineyard covers about 12,500 hectares across 85 municipalities.

Producers say the heat changed the character of the fruit as well as the size of the crop. Kargul said the grapes were marked by the summer heat but that the 2026 vintage still shows fruit and freshness, helped by a stronger tannic structure than usual for a wine sold only weeks after harvest.

France remains by far the main market for Beaujolais nouveau. In 2025, French consumers bought 9 million of the 13.8 million bottles sold, according to the industry. Abroad, Japan and the United States remained the two largest importers. Trade representatives also pointed to encouraging signs in newer markets in Eastern Europe and Asia, suggesting that producers are trying to offset weaker demand in more established wine-drinking countries.

That matters beyond the Beaujolais region itself. The combination of shrinking demand and reduced supply in one of France’s most internationally recognized wine releases could affect exporters, importers and retailers that rely on the wine’s seasonal sales push, even if tighter volumes may support some pricing. The launch also offers a test of whether lighter, fruit-driven wines can hold consumer attention in a global market where overall wine consumption has been weakening.

Beaujolais nouveau has long occupied a distinct place in the wine business because of the speed with which it reaches shelves. Its release is tied as much to marketing and celebration as to the wine itself, with midnight openings and coordinated sales in France and abroad. That visibility has given it a reach far beyond the size of the vineyard, making annual changes in sales and production closely watched by the drinks trade.

This year’s release took place against a broader backdrop of pressure on the wine industry. Global wine production was already expected to edge lower again in 2026, continuing a decline seen over several years as climate shocks and changing consumption patterns weigh on producers. In Beaujolais, those pressures are now visible on both sides of the market: fewer bottles to sell and fewer buyers than before.

Even so, the region is trying to use the wine’s identity to defend its place. Producers continue to present Beaujolais nouveau as a fresh, accessible red with strong fruit character, hoping that profile will stand out as consumers cut back on heavier drinking and become more selective about what they buy.