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British vineyards anticipate early harvest after hot, dry summer boosts grape ripening and quality

Producers expect improved yields and standout vintage as climate change drives expansion and favorable conditions across key regions

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British vineyards are preparing for an early grape harvest this year after a dry, hot summer brought strong ripening conditions across the country. The warm and sunny weather, which many growers attribute to the ongoing effects of climate change, has led to optimism about both the quality and quantity of the 2025 vintage.

According to WineGB, the industry body for British wine producers, English growers planted more than 1,000 new hectares of vines in 2024. This expansion brings the total area under vine to nearly 4,841 hectares, with 3,763 hectares in active production last year. The growth comes as winemaking in the UK continues to expand rapidly. Many European farmers have faced increasingly erratic weather patterns, including droughts and extreme heat, making the UK's more temperate climate attractive for grape growing.

The industry is also recovering from a difficult 2024 season. Last year's production dropped sharply to 10.7 million bottles from 21.6 million in 2023. Persistent rain and cool temperatures led to increased disease pressure, particularly from downy mildew, which affected yields across many regions.

This year's harvest is expected to begin up to two weeks earlier than usual in some areas. In Devon, Duncan Schwab of Sandridge Barton said he plans to start picking grapes in early September after a long period of warm and sunny weather. He noted that while rainfall was limited, there was just enough moisture to support a healthy crop. Schwab described the heat as "just perfect" for grape development and said that while yields would not match the bumper crop of 2023, they would be much improved over last year.

In Cornwall, Sam Lindo of Camel Valley reported excellent ripening conditions for still wine varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc. He said it is rare for these grapes to reach full ripeness suitable for still wine production in the region, making this an exciting year for local winemakers.

Growers in different parts of the UK are seeing varied results. Producers in the south-west expect average yields but exceptional flavors due to concentrated fruit development. In contrast, vineyards in the north-west and Wales are predicting stronger yields overall. The south-east of England remains the country's largest wine

region and is expected to see higher production than last year but still below long-term averages.

Nyetimber, one of Britain's leading sparkling wine producers with vineyards across West Sussex, Hampshire, and Kent, said its output would likely be down slightly as vines recover from last summer's cool and damp conditions. However, head winemaker Cherie Spriggs described this year's growing season as "exceptionally favorable," drawing comparisons to the highly successful 2018 vintage. Nyetimber expects a harvest of between 1.6 million and 1.8 million bottles—nearly triple its output from a decade ago thanks to new vineyard plantings.

At Gusbourne in Kent, Jonathan White reported that their harvest would be up on last year but still below average due to limited rainfall. He emphasized that high sunshine hours have been crucial for ripening grapes and producing high-quality wines this season.

Industry leaders remain cautiously optimistic as harvest approaches. Ian Sargent, chair of WineGB for the Midlands and North regions, said most growers are expecting an early harvest with excellent ripeness and above-average yields in many areas.

Despite positive signs so far, producers acknowledge that final results will depend on weather conditions during the critical weeks leading up to harvest. As Spriggs at Nyetimber noted, "We have an excellent climate for sparkling wine production, but it can still be unpredictable—so we never get ahead of ourselves too early."

The combination of expanded vineyard plantings and favorable weather has positioned British wine producers for what could be a standout vintage year. Growers across the country are watching closely as harvest begins earlier than usual, hoping that continued good weather will deliver both quality and quantity in their wines.