

Spit or Swallow?

Free weekly wine tastings within walking distance BY ANDY VALENTINE

Word knows you don't need to be a wino to get a taste for grapes. It's delicious, inhibition-loosening and, under the right conditions, extremely refreshing. The weather's been beautiful lately, and while snatching up a bottle of Three-Buck-Chuck, dragging a couch into the middle of your lawn, cranking some UB40 and getting sloshed might sound like refreshment enough, there's also a city full of invigorating wine — and easy, fun ways to select what's right for you — just beyond the driveway.

By the time you're done sipping on a wine with craft in its haunches, you won't know whether or not you want to uphold etiquette and spit it out, or say "mazel tov" and guzzle it down.

"We'll buy wines based on knowing a good vintage," says Randy Stokes, manager and buyer at **Sundance Wine Cellars** (2441 Hilyard St.; 687-9463). "As soon as we see them in the book we jump on them without even needing to taste them."

Fortunately Stokes really knows his wines, so tasting isn't always a must, but for those of us who require a little more assurance before we buy, his informed selections are available for sampling seven days a week. Sundance also hosts free, formal wine tastings from 5-7 pm every Friday and Saturday. If you're new to wine tasting, this is a great place to start — low smarm, lotsa charm and goblets of good wine to be tried.

But what about those other five days? Is there a reason we can't drop by somewhere during the workweek and plow through a few samples? No problemo, hard-working citizens; Eugene has a plethora of locations and small businesses offering free wine tastings during the week as well as on Sundays.

Supreme Bean, 16 Tons' Southtowne location (2864 Willamette St.; 485-2700), hosts wine tastings every Thursday between 5-7 pm — which is perfect timing if you're finally stepping out of your hellishly dark, cramped office and into the freedom and warmth of these spring evenings. And if you find that you're getting a taste for tasting, **Jiffy Market** (3443 Hilyard St.; 342-4552) is another spot in that neck of the woods featuring multiple wines for sampling seven days a week.

We can't always rely entirely upon our tongues, though. If you're like me, then you're not as vino-savvy as you could be, and let's face it — there's a spit-bucket full of knowledge going to waste unless you talk to the right people. Thankfully, there are folks like Steve Baker at **Authentica Wines** (766 Park St.; 485-0336), a regular ball of knowledgeable and personable wine-lover. If you're in there for tastings, he's your man — and he's in the business for the fun.

Beyond these particular spots there's a virtual whirlwind of wineries and shops sporting wine on display: **The Broadway** (17 Oakway Cntr.; 685-0790), **New Frontier Market** (1101 W. 8th Ave.; 345-7401), **Market of Choice** (multiple locations; marketofchoice.com), **LaVelle Vineyards** (296 E. 5th Ave.; 338-9875) and **Capella** (2489 Willamette St.; 345-1014), to name but a few, all offering either samples or a scheduled tasting each week. With this much elderberry faderade to choose from, there's no reason you shouldn't end up at home with a woozy sparkle in your eyes and a tannin suction cup in both cheeks. Actually I guess that part's up to you:

What'll it be, Eugene? Shall we spit or swallow? ❖



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LIVE MUSIC SCHEDULE:

Saturday, May 26th
Barefoot Leroy
2 to 5 pm

Sunday, May 27th
Mudpuppy
2 to 5 pm

Monday, May 28th
APROPOS
2 to 5 pm

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