



Raylen Vineyards in Mocksville grows "Syrah" grapes, known for their spicy, peppery qualities. Call (336) 998-3100 or visit www.raylenvineyards.com.

Grapes Galore in North Carolina

Wineries and festivals throughout the state offer excursion options

By Tara Verna

The number of wineries across North Carolina has more than tripled over the past 10 years, with half a dozen new ones scheduled to open in 2004, bringing the total to 36. Why the sudden boom?

Well, thanks to fertile farmland and a mild climate, grapes have always grown well in this state. In recent years, farmers have been looking for alternatives to traditional crops, such as tobacco. And demand—\$30 million in state-produced wine sales and \$2.9 million in grape sales in 2002—has attracted others to the industry. Not to mention the 1 million tourists who visit N.C. wineries and vineyards annually.

"We may not be Napa or Sonoma Valley, but North Carolina has a strong potential to become a popular destination for wine lovers. You can pretty easily visit more than a dozen wineries in a long weekend," says Bob Hodge, webmaster of the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail™ (visit www.yvwt.com) and the North Carolina Winery Locator (www.ncwine.com).

Because they are located in relatively rural parts of the state, many wineries and vineyards are served by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives.

Visit a Winery

Most wineries offer tours of their facilities and samplings of their wines

which range from free to \$5 and often include a souvenir glass (this fee is waived if you purchase wine). Many allow you to bring a picnic or purchase food on the premises to accompany your wine. The rural setting of most wineries and the fact that many grow at least some of their own grapes affords a picturesque setting appreciated by nature and wine lovers alike.

In addition to tours, tastings and wine sales, wineries offer all sorts of seasonal activities, some which require an additional fee. At RagApple Lassic Vineyards in Boonville, you can plant a vine in their vineyard, make a grapevine wreath, and go on a hot air balloon ride. Laurel Gray Vineyards in Hamptonville grows dozens of varieties of tea roses. Both Laurel Gray and West Bend Vineyards in Lewisville offer hayrides. Quite a few, such as Shelton Vineyards near Mount Airy, feature live outdoor music during the summer, plus Shelton makes its own cheeses. And others, like Silver Coast Winery near Ocean Isle Beach, hold themed festivals including the "Blue Grass Festival," "Purple Feet Festival," "Oktoberfest," and "Festa Italia." Be sure to call and confirm hours, events, fees and directions before you go.

Many of the wineries are still small enough to offer perks you might not find at bigger, more commercialized facilities.

You'll often be able to converse with owners, managers and other people directly involved in the grape growing or wine making process.

It's this uniqueness and diversity that Janet Martin, owner/manager of Round Peak Vineyards in Mount Airy, encourages people to discover for themselves. "All of the wineries are so different. They really reflect the personalities of their owners and the local area."

Follow the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail

There are 10 operating wineries and vineyards along the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail™, located in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. In 2003, this region earned the federal designation of Yadkin Valley Viticultural Area in recognition of its unique features, ideally suited to growing high-quality grapes with the potential to produce world-class wines. The region is within an easy drive of Winston-Salem, Greensboro and Charlotte.

Pick your own

There are also 250 vineyards in the state. Vineyards produce grapes while wineries produce wine from grapes, some of which they may grow in their own

vineyards. Some vineyards offer pick-your-own options at grape harvest time in September and October. Thirty-six vineyards in North Carolina grow our nation's first cultivated wine grape—the scuppernong. These bronze-colored native muscadine grapes were first discovered in the Cape Fear River Valley in 1524. The scuppernong is North Carolina's state fruit. Purple or black varieties are simply referred to as muscadines.

After picking your own scuppernongs, you can turn them into juice, jelly, butter, ice cream, pies and more. Or savor the juicy grapes raw, using the proper technique. Visit www.ncwine.org/recipe.htm for recipes and to learn how to eat a scuppernong.

Frequent festivals

If you'd rather go to one place and taste-test the offerings of a number of different wineries, a festival may be the ticket. Some festivals charge a fee up front, while others, like the Yadkin Valley Wine Festival, cater to families by offering free admission and only charging for wine tasting. You'll find all sorts of fun at wine festivals including children's activities like face painting, live music, food, car shows, arts, crafts and more. Visit www.carolinacountry.com for a listing of festivals around the state.

To learn more

There's nothing like a hands-on visit to a winery or festival, but it may mean more if you brush up on the history of grape growing and wine making in North Carolina. Pick up "A Guide to North Carolina's Wineries" by Joseph Mills and Danielle Tarmey. The book features historical and wine making information, plus tours of 22 wineries by region to help narrow your options. Call

(800) 222-9796 or visit www.blairpub.com.

The majority of wineries have their own sites. Visit www.ncwine.com for links to and details on state wineries. The site www.yvwt.com provides information on wineries located in the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail™. Also, www.ncwine.org is the N.C. Department of Agriculture's site that covers a variety of topics including history, recipes, statistics, starting a winery and more. Find additional links and photos at www.carolinacountry.com.

The vineyards at Shelton Vineyards in Dobson. www.sheltonvineyards.com

Gary Maxey, dressed as "Bacchus" the Roman god of wine, samples wines at the 2003 Yadkin Valley Wine Festival. (Photo by Bob Hodge)

North Carolina's oldest winery, Duplin Winery grows muscadine grapes known as "scuppernongs" in addition to others.



Homeowner Loans

LOWEST RATES IN 40 YEARS

1ST MORTGAGES (Fixed Rates)

	30 yr	15 yr
Amount	*5.250%	*4.5%
\$75,000	\$414.15	\$573.74
\$125,000	\$690.25	\$956.24
\$200,000	\$1,104.41	\$1,529.99



Free Appraisal!

- Lower your monthly payment
- Bill consolidation and home improvements
- Fast/local closings

*Refinance Now
Rates are low
Don't Miss Out*

Servicing North Carolina's Mortgage Needs Since 1991

FEDERATED MORTGAGE, INC.

(800) 466-1635

* Restrictions Apply
* Rates subject to change and qualification Apply by phone or online

* 30 year APR 5.54%

* 15 year APR 4.99%

* Credit and collateral subject to qualification

* Appraisal fee reimbursed at closing

www.fedmort.com

Multi-State Mortgage Licensee

Fixed Rates