

Getting Into the Holiday Spirits: Wine, Beer, And Liquor Producers Move Toward Plant-Based And Organic



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Everyone knows wine is made from grapes and beer is made from hops, yeast, and grain. Right?

Well, mostly.

Like most processed food and drink today, various other ingredients are added to wine and beer for flavor, preservation, clarification, and other purposes. Because alcohol, unlike other food and drink products, doesn't need to

list all ingredients on the label, it's really easy to simply not know what's in our drinks. And whether or not you're a vegetarian or vegan, you might be surprised out to learn that some of those additives aren't always plant-based.

With the holidays on our doorsteps, many of us have celebrations on the horizon (even if they will be over Zoom this year). In many cases, that means wine, beer, and spirits are going to be many folks' beverages of choice, and few would disagree that consumers today want to know what's in their glass. Here's a rundown of what to look for (and avoid) in your drinks this season, and some brands you can trust for cruelty-free sips.

What's not vegan about alcohol?

Some styles of beer include lactose – that sugar that about 65% of the population can't digest fully or at all – for flavor. Milk stouts, as the name would suggest, typically include milk sugar to add a creamy sweetness, and some other styles, like pastry stouts or fruited sours, will use it on occasion too.

It's also worth noting that some beers use honey for flavor, as well. If you're a honey-avoidant vegan or simply trying to cut down on the sticky stuff, you may want to be careful, as this sneaky ingredient isn't always made apparent from a beer's name or description.

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But it gets a little gnarlier. Beer and wine are sometimes clarified (where solids are removed to give a clear liquid) with gelatin, egg whites, or isinglass – a derivative of fish bladders. The use of isinglass or gelatin means some beer and wine isn't even vegetarian-friendly. Not to mention...fish bladders? In wine? Doesn't exactly sound appealing.

Most wine, beer, and spirits are fine for vegans

The good news, though, is twofold: Lots of wine and beer are made without any animal additives whatsoever, and there's a major resource to help you figure out what's vegan-friendly. Experienced vegans who imbibe probably already know about Barnivore, an expansive database of the veg-friendly status of wine, beer, and spirits. The information is sourced by checking directly with the drink producers, often multiple times, so it's a reliable resource. And it currently covers over 50,000 different products, so whether you're picking up a store-brand two buck chuck or a niche craft beer from a microbrewery, chances are they have some intel.

If you're a true wine person, you'll be glad to know that some wine producers are mostly, or completely, vegan. You might recognize the brand Layer Cake, perhaps known best for their reds but also producers of white and rosés as well – their entire portfolio is vegan. This is also true of popular wine brand Bread and Butter, a California maker that includes reds as well as white and rosé. And of course, small, independent producers are always a good bet. Oregon's Lumos Wine makes not only vegan but organic wines, and Frey Vineyards in California is vegan friendly and organic as well as biodynamic and free of sulfites.

Some breweries, too, avoid animal additives entirely. Those include Sierra Nevada, of course, widely considered the original better-for-the-planet brewery. Sixpoint, the trend-leading Brooklyn brewery that regularly has hipsters lining up for special releases, eventually phased out the use of animal additives so their brews are a safe bet. The upstate New York brewery Ommegang, known for their Belgian farmhouse styles, is also reliably vegan. Southern California brewery Modern Times is also, quite famously, entirely vegan on account of one of the owners being a longtime vegan. Their taproom locations in

Los Angeles and San Diego offer killer menus of plant-based food.

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If you're more of a spirits drinker, you'll be relieved to know that the vast majority of distilled beverages are vegan-friendly (but just to be sure, Barnivore covers those, too). There are a few exceptions, though, like cream-based liqueurs such as Bailey's. The good news for Irish coffee fans, though, is that Bailey's also makes an almond milk-based variety. Happy St. Patrick's Day, indeed.

Beyond cruelty-free: organic and biodynamic bevs

Also worth noting is the rise of organic beverages. If you're a person who thinks carefully about your food and drink choices, either for the sake of your personal health, the environment, or the welfare of animals (or a combination of the three), it may interest you to know that lots of drinks are being made from organic ingredients. An organic beer, for example, uses at least 95% organically grown ingredients – that is, no GMOs, synthetic fertilizers, or pesticides, according to Food Republic. While there aren't many breweries that are exclusively organic (though some, like Peak Organics, do exist), lots of craft breweries are moving in that direction with organic options. Jai Ho's Midnight IPA, Sierra Nevada's Estate Ale, Samuel Smith's Organic Cherry Ale, and even Michelob's Ultra Pure Gold Premium Light Lager are all organic.

With the world of craft beverages becoming thoughtful and competitive all the time, it isn't much of a surprise to see more organic and plant-based options becoming available. People are caring more and more about what they put in their

bodies, and makers are being more and more careful about what goes into their prized products. Drinking better for our bodies, other animals, and the environment this holiday season? I'll raise a glass to that.

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