

What Does Tannin Contribute to a Wine?

Tannin: structure, flavor, texture and ageability

Tannin gets talked about a lot, but what exactly is it and what does it contribute to wine? **Tannin** is a compound that comes from the stems, skins and seeds of grapes. Because red wine is fermented with the grape skins, tannin is much more present in red wines than white wines. The amount of tannin in a wine depends on the type of grape (for example, cabernet sauvignon grapes have much more tannin than pinot noir), the amount of time the wine spends on the skins and seeds, and if oak barrels were used in the winemaking process (the inside of oak barrels can provide a small amount of tannin). The flavor of ripe tannin is a good kind of bitterness, like dark chocolate or espresso, while unripe tannin, which happens when the grapes are picked before they are fully ripe, is unpleasantly bitter. The feeling of tannin is dryness, the same feeling you get when you drink strong black tea or bite into an unripe banana.

Tannin plays a big role in wine, not only providing flavor and texture, but also **structure** and **ageability**. Structure, a hard-to-define quality that can take a good wine to great, is the underlying "scaffolding" of a wine--it provides a "shape" to the wine and defines how the elements in the wine--alcohol, tannin, acidity and sugar--relate to one another. Tannin also contains elements that help a wine age. Think of the types of wine that famously age for 30 or 40 years--they are most often red wines that were strongly structured and very tannic when young (for example, Bordeaux red wines). Time allows tannins to soften, and tannins allow wine to survive the ravages of time. Now if someone could just bottle tannin in a **night cream**.