

## How to Decant Wine



What is all this decanting about? Why do some bottles of wine get decanted, and others don't? How long should you decant for, and how does that vary by wine?

Decanting is all about removing *sediment* from a wine, and allowing the wine to *breathe*. These are things that older, red wines do - young wines and white wines do not usually have to be decanted.

First, the sediment. Wines have all sorts of organic things in them - yeast, grape skins, and so on. The wine naturally has very small particles of these things that, over the years that wine age, settle out of the wine. That's why with older red wines, which have much more skin contact, you get more sediment.

The trick is to pour the wine slowly into the decanter, keeping the same side down that was down during the aging process. You don't want to mix all that sediment in now! Be sure not to let the sediment end up in the decanting glass. Some people, with a bottle full of sediment (i.e. an old port), pour "over a candle". The candle just helps you see the sediment in the bottle neck better as it begins to slide towards the opening.

OK, now you have a wine without sediment in it. Why would you let it sit there? Isn't wine and air a bad combination? Well, yes and no. Yes, during the years of aging you don't want air getting to the wine. However, now that you're about to drink it, air getting across a good surface area of a wine can bring out its aromas.



Remember that your tongue can only taste four types of tastes - all of the other sensations you get from wine come from your nose. You want that wine to be giving off aromas! If it's not releasing flavors into the air, it's going to taste like strange water. You can usually let the wine sit in the decanter for 1/2 to 1 hour before you drink it. You'll see how its flavor changes over the evening as you drink.

There is of course a point at which the air causes more damage than good. If you let the wine sit out for say 8 hours, it warm up to your ambient room temperature which in modern times is 70F or more, which is awful for wine flavor. When the French talked of

Room Temperature in the 1800s, they meant in the 50s! Also, wine + air = vinegar. If you let it sit there for over 8 hours, the vinegar flavors are going to overpower any nice flavors the wine had, as it goes through this conversion. If you don't finish the wine over the course of your meal or discussion, seal the rest up and put it into the fridge.

This is true for vintage ports as well. While the port is fortified, it is still a delicate wine and not meant for a lot of air contact. You really can taste the flavor difference in a port that's been left open for too long.

Note that just taking a cork out of a bottle does very little as far as "breathing". The tiny amount of surface area touching the air in the bottle neck will cause no real change in the wine over even a few hours. You want a decanter that creates a lot of surface air, for the wine to interact with that air. If you look at the above photo of a decanter, you can see how the natural shape of the decanter causes the wine to stretch out and get a lot of surface contact.

From a Visitor:

*"When you Decant Wine, does it matter whether the decanter is on its side or standing straight up?"*

I'm not sure how you could possibly put any decanter on its side. Decanters are open topped pitchers because the whole purpose is to let a lot of air contact the wine, to help it breathe and open up. If you put it on its side, all the wine would pour out!

The primary reason you keep wine bottles on their side during storage is so the cork stays wet - so it doesn't dry out and let in air. You're doing the opposite here. You are trying to expose as much air as you can to the wine, during the hour or two you are decanting it. So this has nothing to do with long term storage or wet corks. It solely has to do with wine sitting in a decanter, interacting with the air. The decanter is meant to do that in its normal position