

# Discover EAST Willamette Valley Wineries

by Tamara Muldoon

Oregon's Willamette Valley, with more than 400 wineries, has garnered world-wide acclaim for producing outstanding wines. However, looking at some winery maps of the Willamette Valley AVA, you might think the region east of Interstate 5 is a wine desert. Not so.

Scattered among the lush farmland and forested slopes of the western Cascade foothills, more than a dozen family-owned and -operated wineries offer a less crowded, unhurried opportunity for wine tasting. And the list of varietals to sample is constantly growing. These winemakers smartly chose to form their own marketing collective—Cascade Foothills Winegrowers—rather than be lost in the crowd across the Valley.

Stretching between I-5 and the Cascade Mountains, from Oregon City (southeast of Portland) to Stayton (southeast of Salem), the East Willamette Valley region's quiet,

interconnected back roads allow a relaxing, intimate wine-tasting experience. Here, the owner or winemaker—often one and the same—is likely to greet you and personally guide you through a tasting.

## Christopher Bridge Cellars

([christopherbridgewines.com](http://christopherbridgewines.com))

Step into this tasting room, and you are immediately drawn to its outdoor patio overlooking vineyards and an expansive Willamette Valley view. Owner and winemaker, Chris Carlberg, loves to talk with visitors about the continuously evolving, creative process of his craft. Along with estate-grown Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, you can sample less-common wines, such as Ehrenfelser and Muscat. This spring, try their new releases of German varietals rarely found in Oregon.



St. Joseph's Winery

## Forest Edge Vineyard

([forestedgevineyard.com](http://forestedgevineyard.com))

Hidden away amid vineyard, orchard and forest, this unpretentious small winery operates using sustainable, organic methods. In addition to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and well-balanced red blends, you'll find hard cider, sparkling hard cider and scrumptious dessert wines—all at affordable prices. Newly released are two dessert wines: ice wine-style Sucre Chardonnay, and Forest Ember, a fortified red wine similar to port.

## St. Josef's Winery

([stjosefswinery.com](http://stjosefswinery.com))

In business for more than 30 years, St. Josef's is among Oregon's wine pioneers, planting the first Syrah vines in the Willamette Valley. This three-generation, family-owned winery produces reasonably priced, food-friendly European-style wines. The winery, with its fountain courtyard and lakeside garden, makes a delightful tasting destination. Be sure to try the Winemakers White blend for a surprising flavor explosion. This year's new releases are Kitara 2011 Pinot Noir and Lilli Sparking Syrah, both available only at the winery.

## Alexeli Vineyard & Winery

([alexeli.com](http://alexeli.com))

This winery's owners got a jump-start on the business in 2007 when they acquired a 61-acre property with mature 28-year-old vines, which they tend using sustainable, LIVE-certified practices (see "Sustainable Wines" on page 109). Their extensive tasting menu of primarily estate-grown varietals includes Pinot Noir, Müller-Thurgau and Riesling. Linger over a bottle on the outdoor patio or lakeside gazebo. Among seven new releases are 2013 Chardonnay and 2014 Gewürztraminer.

## Piluso Vineyard & Winery

([pilusovines.com](http://pilusovines.com))

"Great wines begin with great grapes," says winemaker Sandee Piluso, who focuses on cultivating healthy,



The Vintner's Garden shelter at Piluso Vineyard & Winery

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## When You Go

To plan your East Willamette Valley wine-tasting adventure, visit Cascade Foothills Winegrowers at [eastvalleywine.com](http://eastvalleywine.com). Buy a Cascade Foothills Winery Passport and enjoy discounts while visiting them all. And, consider including some of the area's other attractions, such as Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm, Schreiner's Iris Garden, Swan Island Dahlias, Oregon Garden and Silver Falls State Park. For more information about exploring the East Willamette Valley area, go online at [mthoodterritory.com](http://mthoodterritory.com) for Clackamas County and [travelsalem.com](http://travelsalem.com) for Marion County.

well-balanced fruit to make the highest quality wine. Piluso says it's the fruit that dictates its best unique expression for each vintage. Among her highly-rated, award-winning wines are estate-grown Pinot Noir, Italian-style Dolcetto and Spanish varietal Tempranillo.

Outside the tasting room you'll discover the "Vintner's Garden," with lounging chairs and a clever garden shelter with lots of windows and wicker furniture, perfect for savoring a bottle of wine with friends. Look for spring releases of 2014 Fiore Bianco and Grüner Veltliner. ☺



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