

Hot new wines out of Napa Valley are white

By Elin McCoy, Bloomberg

When a collector friend offered me a glass of Screaming Eagle recently, I automatically pictured the cult winery's polished, pricey red. Instead, I got my first taste of its sophisticated, wildly expensive, almost entirely unattainable white.

Chances are, when you think of Napa Valley, you think of red wine. Well, get ready to be surprised.

In this classic Cabernet territory, dozens of top-end wineries are focusing the same kind of every-detail-matters approach to whites that they've long lavished on their more prestigious reds.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Perfect winter comfort food

By Kathryn Reed

When I didn't know how to fix something at my house that I thought by a certain age I should have known already, my friend Rene told me we learn things when we need to know them.

I channeled that sentiment of his when I called my mom last month to ask how to make mashed potatoes. Yes, I really had

never made them before. I got a lesson in mashed vs. whipped potatoes, which potatoes work better, the suggestion to use salt in the water when boiling the potatoes, and using some of that water for mashing.

The potatoes are what take the longest with this recipe, so keep that in mind for timing. (Of course, there are always instant mashed potatoes out of a box or whatever they come in.) But you also want them hot, so really, they should be made last.

This is one of those perfect winter comfort foods.



Upside Down Shepherd's Pie

1 T olive oil

10 ounces ground beef or meat substitute

1 C onion, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ medium turnip, chopped

1 medium carrot, chopped

3 tsp fresh rosemary, chopped

5 garlic cloves, minced

2 C vegetable stock

2 T flour

1 C frozen green peas

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp black pepper

1 tsp kosher salt

3 C mashed potatoes

If using real meat, cook it in a little oil over medium heat.

Heat oil in pan, cook onion, turnip, carrot, rosemary and garlic until vegetables are tender. Add meat to the mix.

Blend stock and flour so there are no lumps. Add stock mixture to pan; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and simmer 4 minutes or until thickened. Stir in peas, pepper, and salt.

Divide potatoes between four shallow bowls, then top evenly with veggie mixture.

App just for the Nevada beer drinkers

By Mike Higdon, Reno Gazette-Journal

For both the beer connoisseur and those new to the craft beer world, the Nevada Brewers Association app is the newest way to discover the state's wide range of award-winning beers, find tap houses, rate and share what you taste.

Users can check in with a favorite brew and the app will recommend other beers based on style and provide a map to the next destination.

It includes more than 30 Northern and Southern Nevada

breweries who are members of the association.

Read the whole story

2 community soup nights in Truckee

Slow Food Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Food Hub's seventh series of Community Soup Night resume this month.

Community Soup Nights will be from 6:00-7:30pm. The series kicks-off on March 15 at FiftyFifty Brewing Co. at The Rock and on March 29 at Full Belly Deli's Truckee location in the Pioneer Center.

Community Soup Night is a family-friendly event and all are welcome to attend. The cost is \$5 at the door for a bowl of soup and slice of bread. A vegetarian option will also be offered. A fresh salad may be added for \$2 and drink specials will be available for purchase.

Chef Felipe Garcia from FiftyFifty Brewing Co. and Chef Tom Marrin from Full Belly Deli will be preparing their unique creations. Each evening will host live music by Sean McAlindin and Aaron Oropeza, as well as a raffle to win a variety of prizes.

Proceeds from each Soup Night will go toward Slow Food Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Food Hub's initiatives to educate and reconnect the local community to our sustainable and regional food system.

Bill would increase Nevada craft beer production

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review Journal

CARSON CITY – A bill seeking to increase the amount of beer craft breweries can produce annually ran into a foamy wall of opposition from large liquor interests during a legislative hearing last week.

Senate Bill 130 from Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden, would increase the allowed production capacity from 15,000 barrels to 45,000 barrels a year. A barrel is the equivalent of 31 gallons.

Settelmeyer said his proposal is aimed at helping small businesses in Nevada grow.

Read the whole story

Olive oil prices to squeeze wallets

By Associated Press

From specialty shops in Rome to supermarkets around the world, lovers of Italian olive oil are in for some sticker shock this year, with prices due to jump by as much as 20 percent.

The combination of bad weather and pests hit the harvest in Southern Europe, most of all in Italy, where production is halved from last fall. That's pushing up Italian wholesale prices by 64 percent as of mid-February compared with a year earlier, which translates to shelf price increases of 15 to 20 percent in Italy.

In other countries, the ultimate price increases will depend on several factors – such as how much retailers take on the costs themselves and the change in currency values. The U.S., for example, is likely to see a more modest rise in price as a stronger dollar keeps a lid on the cost of imports.

Italy's harvest was especially hard hit by the combination of early rains that knocked buds off the trees and the threat of an olive fly that forced an early harvest, further cutting yields. Wholesale prices of olive oil from Spain, the world's largest producers, are up a more modest 10 percent, with yields similar to last year's.

Vincenzo Iacovissi, the owner of the Sapor d'Olio olive oil shop in Rome, says sales have dropped, though he's tried to ease the shock for customers by explaining why prices have gone up.

"When there are increases of 15 to 20 percent there is some impact on sales. However, explaining the reasons for this increase has in part helped to make up for this," Iacovissi said.

Italians collectively consume about 20 percent of the world's olive oil, leading Spain at 16 percent, and that affinity makes them pretty resilient as consumers. The U.S. is the third-biggest market, consuming 10 percent of the yearly total.

The vast majority of the olive oil consumed in the U.S. is imported, with Italy and Spain being the top two sources of imports, according to the North American Olive Oil

Association. The group notes that imports from Italy are not necessarily Italian olive oil but may be bottled there.

Flaminia Leoni, a 50-year-old mother of four, buys 80 to 100 liters of olive oil a year for her family and says that at most she will consider substituting lower quality olive oil for extra virgin for cooking – but not on the table, where olive oil is a staple giving accent to pasta, meats, salads and vegetables.

Cedric Casanova, the owner of an Italian grocery in Paris, said he was hoping to get 30,000 liters of olive oil delivered, but received just 8,000 liters. He will have to rely on leftover stock from last year to help make up for the remaining difference – and absorb some of the price increase himself.

“I’m working with a standard price, by trying to assume the cost myself,” he said.

With global stocks down just 14 percent, no one is predicting general olive oil shortages, even with a 75 percent increase in consumption of olive oil over the last 25 years as demand pushed into non-traditional markets. The market for olive oil in the period has grown by two-fold in the United States, seven-fold in Britain and 14-fold in Japan, according to Italy’s Coldiretti farm lobby, even if continental Europe remains by far the largest market.

Italian olive oil is more vulnerable than that of other major producers to climate shifts and pests due to its varied topography, from hills in the north to larger groves in the south. This also lends great variety to Italian olive oil, where unique flavors are derived from a combination of the terrain, topography and the more than 400 olive varieties, according to Nicola Di Noia, an olive oil expert for the Coldiretti farm lobby.

“We have hundreds of different varieties of olives that are

more difficult to defend compared with Spain or northern Africa, where there are big groves that are easier to manage," Di Noia said.

He said the challenge is educating consumers about why they pay for quality.

"We need to learn to choose oils with awareness. Extra-virgin is the juice of a fruit. The primary material from which it derives is very important. Therefore, oil should be tasted and smelled," he said.

Grow a high yield veggie garden this season

By Melinda Myers

Spend less time and money while growing a bounty of flavorful vegetables this growing season. Increase your harvest, even in small garden spaces, with proper planning and easy care, high yielding vegetables.

A productive garden starts with a plan, but choosing the best vegetables to grow and where to plant them can be overwhelming.

You can break out the graph paper and pencils to design your garden or turn to technology for help. Many websites and apps provide ready-to-use garden plans or planning guidelines. Places like Gardener's Supply offers free pre-planned gardens that do the planning for you.



This plan enables gardeners to grow more than 50 pounds of produce in 18 square feet of space. Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

These and other intensively planted gardens require proper soil preparation to maximize productivity. Invest time up front to reduce ongoing maintenance and increase your harvest. Dig several inches of compost or other organic matter into the top 8 to 12 inches of the soil. This improves drainage in heavy soil and increases the water holding ability in fast draining soils. Incorporate a slow release organic fertilizer at the same time. This provides needed nutrients throughout the growing season. Check the label and your plants to determine if a mid-season application is needed.

Maximize your planting budget by starting your plants from seeds. Many gardeners like to start long season plants like tomatoes and broccoli from seeds indoors. This keeps their green thumb warmed up for the season and provides the greatest selection of vegetable varieties. Others buy these plants from their local garden center. Start seeds of shorter season crops like greens, radishes, and squash directly in the garden when the growing season begins. Check the seed packet for specific directions on when and how to plant these seeds indoors and out.

When shopping for seeds, select varieties suited to your climate and known for their disease resistance and high yield.

Most vegetables produce best when grown in full sun. Greens and root crops are a bit more shade tolerant.

Once planted, cover the soil surrounding the seeded rows and transplants with a thin layer of shredded leaves, herbicide-free grass clippings or evergreen needles. This mulch helps conserve moisture and suppress weeds. Plus, it improves the soil as it breaks down. You'll save time and improve your plants' health and productivity with this one task.

After it's planted and mulched, you'll spend minimal time maintaining your garden. But be sure to plan a bit of time to enjoy the big, flavorful harvest your high yield garden is sure to provide.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening".

Vineyard managers optimistic weather not an issue

By Brian Freedman, Forbes

Unusual weather throughout much of the United States this winter has been the subject of speculation, consternation, and obsession across the country. Springlike heat in the Mid-Atlantic and flooding rains in the West have wreaked havoc across a wide range of industries. In the past two months, both the Napa River and the Russian River, the latter in Sonoma County, hit flood levels.

How, then, is this weather affecting the great wine regions of California? And what will the impact be for the 2017 vintage?

Fortunately, because of the natural cycles of vine growth and vineyard-management requirements, the floods don't seem to have caused too much damage to the vineyards themselves—at least, nothing that can't be fixed. “[Other] than physical damage to the trellising and needing to remove debris from vineyards which were flooded (including our own Westside Farms in the Russian River Valley),” there hasn't been any damage to the vineyards of Ramey Wine Cellars, David Ramey noted in an email.

Read the whole story

Don't dismiss Cabs from the foothills

By Mike Dunn, Sacramento Bee

My turnaround on Cabernet Sauvignon from the Sierra foothills began one day last fall as I stood at the tasting counter of Hart 2 Hart Vineyards at Pilot Hill in El Dorado County.

Dominic Mantei was pouring tastes of wines he makes on the premises, some bottled under the brand Hart 2 Hart, others released with the label Everhart Cellars.

I was impressed by how fine, fresh and frisky the lineup was, but when he got to the Everhart Cellars 2013 Pilot Ridge Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$45) I realized by the wine's authority and balance that I needed to revisit Cabernets from the foothills, which never have been closely identified with the varietal.

Read the whole story

Bill would reduce number of free school meals

By Mary Clare Jalonick, AP

WASHINGTON — House Republicans last week weighed legislation that could lower the number of students receiving free and reduced-price meals at school.

Legislation debated by the House Education and Workforce Committee aims to save money by scaling back the number of schools in which all students receive free or reduced meals. It would also help schools that say the Obama administration's healthier meal rules are too restrictive and not appealing enough to students.

A proposed Republican amendment to the bill would go even further, allowing a trial period of so-called block grants for school meals in three states. That would mean those states wouldn't receive unlimited federal dollars for students who qualify for the free and reduced-price lunches.

Hunger and nutrition advocates from the American Academy of Pediatrics to the American Heart Association have sharply criticized the legislation.

"The bill would significantly weaken access to healthy, nutritious foods for our nation's children," said Benard Dreyer, president of the pediatrics group.

The block grant provision, included in an amendment by Rep. Todd Rokita of Indiana, even prompted opposition from the School Nutrition Association, which has called for major changes in the school meal standards put in place in recent

years and championed by first lady Michelle Obama.

The group, which represents school nutrition directors and the companies that sell food to schools, called the block grant idea “reckless” and said it would be a first step toward eliminating the federal guarantee that all children have access to the nutrition they need at school.

Republicans said the changes would help save money while ensuring that those with the highest need are still guaranteed meals. The committee was scheduled to vote on the amendment and the overall bill on Wednesday.

Republicans, including Rokita and committee chairman John Kline of Minnesota, said the changes would help save money while ensuring that those with the highest need are still guaranteed meals. The bill would raise the threshold for a government program called community eligibility, in which schools in districts with high poverty rates can provide free meals to all students at the school.

Republicans said it would better target taxpayer money by scaling back free meals for the some of the students that attend those high-poverty schools, but don't qualify for free or reduced meals. They noted that the bill also provides an increase in federal reimbursements for school breakfasts.

“This is hardly unreasonable and it's hardly unfair,” said Rokita.

The bill would allow a wider variety of foods to be sold in lunch lines, an attempt to provide flexibility to schools that have complained that the Obama administration's standards are too strict.

Democrats objected to the efforts to save money on school meals and to loosen the nutrition standards. Virginia Rep. Bobby Scott, the top Democrat on the panel, said the bill would “cut budgets instead of feeding our children.”

The partisan split on the House panel was in contrast to a bipartisan Senate compromise. With the support of Democrats, the GOP-led Senate Agriculture Committee passed legislation in January that would ease requirements for whole grains in school meals and delay a deadline to cut sodium levels. The House bill goes much further.

The healthier school meal rules that have been phased in since 2012 and set fat, sugar and sodium limits on foods in the lunch line and beyond. They require more whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Schools have long been required to follow government nutrition rules if they accept federal reimbursements for free and reduced-price meals for low-income students, but the new standards are stricter.