

## Frequently Asked Questions: Wine Crystals

### Why are there crystals in my wine?

- Those are tartrates! Tartrates, affectionately known by industry professionals as “wine diamonds,” are tiny, crystalline deposits that occur in wines when potassium and tartaric acid, both naturally occurring products of grapes, bind together to form a crystal. Tartrates are scientifically known as potassium bitartrate, which is the same thing as cream of tartar used in cooking. They are completely harmless and natural. The formation of wine diamonds is less common in red wines, as their level of tartaric acid is lower, and crystals tend to fall out naturally during the longer barrel-aging process.

### Why do wine crystals/diamonds form?

- Tartrates are a normal byproduct of wine as it ages—but if the wine is exposed to temperatures below 40°F, wine diamonds can form within one week of a wine bottle’s exposure to extreme temperatures (think a bartender’s cold box where beers, wines and juices are all stored at the same temperature). It is these chilly conditions that make the tartaric acid compounds in a wine naturally combine with potassium to form a crystal.

### What methods are used to remove tartrates?

- Winemakers do employ a process called cold stabilization to remove tartrates from white wine before it is bottled. Many producers do use this technique for purely aesthetic reasons with the hopes of eliminating wine diamonds. The old standard for cold stability in California winemaking was 28°F for 10 days, which is only acceptable if you are selling a product that is mass marketed at an exceptionally low price. Very cold stabilization strips a wine of its aromas and flavors, so we only cold stabilize our large batch wines at 38° to 40°F, depending on the delicacy of the vintage, and we don’t cold stabilize our small batch wines or Wine Club Exclusive wines. Maintaining our quality and consistency is critical to our reputation, so we don’t resort to extreme measures of cold stability that put quality of taste at risk.

### Do tartrates affect the quality of the wine?

- No. Actually, the presence of tartrate crystals is viewed by many winemakers, sommeliers and academics as a sign of quality, indicating that the wine was not overprocessed. Wine crystals never impart an unpleasant taste.

### How should I serve wine that has tartrate crystals?

- If wine diamonds appear on a cork, simply wipe them away with a cloth. If their appearance in a glass is disagreeable to the consumer, decant the last quarter-bottle of wine, leaving any crystals behind. Pouring through a cheesecloth is also acceptable.