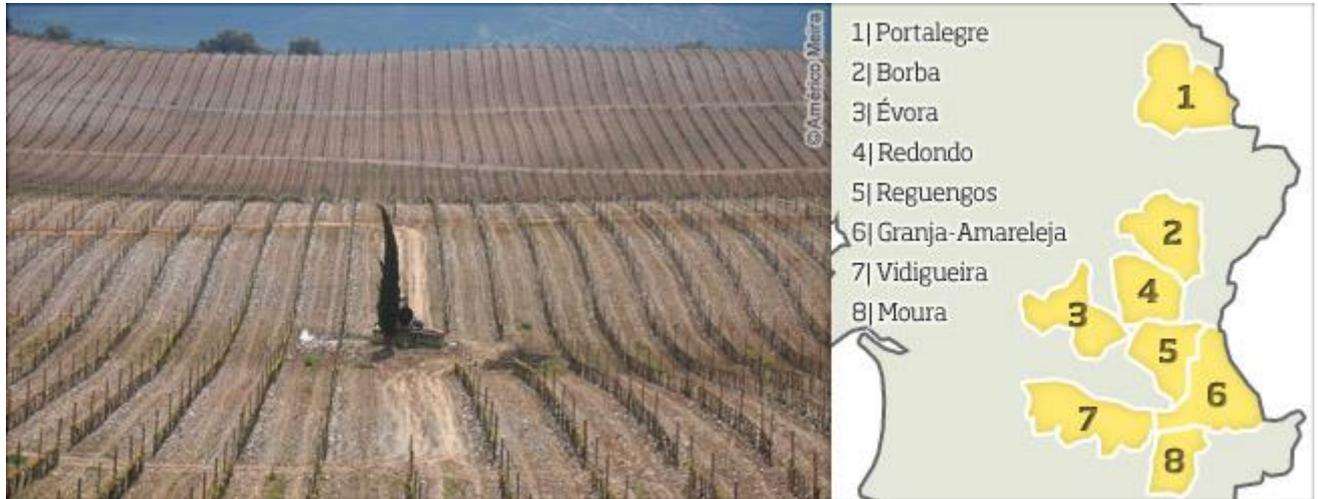


## Alentejo

The Alentejo region covers about a third of Portugal, and winemakers in the remaining two-thirds can often be heard to complain about the popularity of Alentejo wines.



The reds, easy drinkers, rich and fruity, are the darlings of Lisbon cafés and restaurants, also to be found on wine lists the length of the country. There are quaffing wines, but also fine wines, especially in the red department. Whites are more difficult in this hot climate, but some very good ones are made, given the right place, and/or appropriate skill in vineyards and cellar.

It's a short drive up from the cool of the Algarve, over the hills and into the hot southern part of the Alentejo (or seriously cold, should it be winter). Most of the Alentejo consists of undulating plains and gentle hills, with serious mountains only in the north east, where, near the town of Portalegre, the São Mamede mountain range rises up by the border with Spain, and the air becomes cooler and the countryside greener. Soils vary greatly: schist, pink marble, granite, limestone, often laid upon a sub-layer of water-retaining clay.

DOP Alentejo has eight sub-regions that together cover about a fifth of the Vinho Regional Alentejano region, but these are rarely seen a label. It makes sense to take advantage of the name Alentejo (or Vinho Regional Alentejano). Seven of the sub-regions are clustered fairly centrally. Portalegre lies well to the north east on the granite foothills of the São Mamede mountains, where higher rainfall and cooler temperatures especially at night, along with many old vines, gives complexity and freshness.

Borba, Évora, Redondo and Reguengos are more typical of the Alentejo, and can make smooth, harmonious, very easy-drinking reds. Conditions are more challenging in Granja-Amareleja, Moura and Vidigueira, with poor, limestone-based soils and a significantly hotter climate. Nonetheless, a new generation of producers, particularly around Vidigueira, has shown the potential of these southern parts of the Alentejo.

The white Antão Vaz is the star grape of the region, with good acidity and tropical fruit flavours. It also responds well to barrel-fermentation. Arinto and Roupeiro also offer precious acidity; white Diagalves, Manteúdo, Perrum and Rabo de Ovelha make up the blends. Aragonez (Tempranillo) is the most widely-planted red grape. The red-fleshed French grape

Alicante Bouschet is often the inky, treacley backbone of red blends. Alfrocheiro, Castelão and Trincadeira also have valuable parts to play, with Moreto, Tinta Caiada and Tinta Grossa padding out some blends.

However, many of the new generation of Alentejo reds incorporate imported grapes such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, made as Vinho Regional.

### **Effects of Romanisation**

The Roman presence in Alentejo contributed to the implementation of the vine in several areas of the region. After the foundation of Beja, between 31 and 27 BC, there was a great increase in the growing of vines. Pieces of pottery, grape seeds and a granite press were found near Vidigueira.



### **Wine Incentives**

After expelling the invaders from Alentejo, the royal authorities and religious orders encouraged the production of wine. The population was forced to grow vines and, after three to five years, donate a certain part of their yield. In 1221, D.Afonso Henriques established that the grapes and wine produced would be property of the Sé de Évora.