

WINES & VINES

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Tips on Buying Crushers and Presses

Crushers and destemmers can be bought separately or in combination. For red winemaking, destemmer-crushers (which destem first) are preferred by most winemakers. The amateur winemaker will very likely start with an Italian-made crusher with a destemmer screen which is available in hand-operated or motorized versions. Care should be taken to purchase a stainless steel screen rather than a painted one. A small winery crushing less than 100 tons a year can buy a motorized unit with a must pump. Buying the unit with the pump on the bottom is preferable to buying the pump as a separate unit. It is also worth considering how easy or difficult it will be to load the crusher from the picking bins.

Destemmer-crushers with a capacity of 8 or 11 tons per hour are available. Capacity is seldom an issue by itself because crushers outrun presses. It is important that the rollers can be adjusted far enough apart so that the seeds are not broken and the grapes macerated rather than smashed. Rubber rollers are less likely to damage the seeds than steel ones. A variable speed unit can prevent stems going into the must. Above all, it is necessary to be assured of quick, reliable service in case of need and that spare parts are available.

The vertical ratchet press, still the most commonly used press by amateurs and small wineries, is rapidly being replaced by the small vertical bladder press. A ½-ton press costs far less than a 2- to 4-ton press, and a small winery might well consider using three of these (which one person can operate at one time) until a larger press is needed. When a larger press is considered by a smaller winery, thought should be given to lowering the cost by renting, cooperative use, or contracting out excess capacity.

The horizontal bladder or membrane press has almost totally replaced the horizontal basket press. While the unit must be able to press gently and efficiently, it also should have the flexibility to apply the progressively increasing pressures required in making champagne. It should be possible to load machine-picked fruit as easily as whole clusters. The fully enclosed tank press, which can press under CO₂ or nitrogen, is no longer as much in vogue as it once was.

Continuous presses are of special interest to wineries processing larger quantities of grapes. Some winemakers question the quality of wine made from this press. Concerns about quality also arise in connection with moving the must. While some winemakers believe that a good quality must pump with an auger and screw greatly aids the ease of operation, other winemakers are strong believers in the use of gravity to raise wine quality.

Ease of repair and availability of parts are also important considerations when buying presses. Electronic systems in older presses have sometimes been the cause of problems, particularly where the electronics and hardware have later been customized or modified, but electronics have now improved to the point where the purchase of computerized presses can be recommended at the 1800-liter level. If payments are too high, it may be worth considering the industry-wide trends towards leasing.