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Frequently-Asked Questions about oak chips

Arôbois produces wood for oenology. We use the term « chips » as a simplification; in fact the word covers a whole range of products for use in the fermentation and ageing of wine, as well as other alcoholic beverages. Our products can be used to complement the use of oak barrels, but are not intended as a direct alternative, for although they contribute the same aromatic compounds as barrels, they cannot give the steady oxygen flow for which barrels are so appreciated. However there are other clear advantages, such as economy and ease of use.

Chip usage is a recent phenomenon, and can at first seem complex. That is why we offer you the answers to the questions that we are most frequently asked. The replies which follow are simply to guide you. Each user should adapt them to his or her own needs.

Is the use of chips permitted in wine?

Since 2009, the use of oak chips during Alcoholic Fermentation is allowed within the European Union. For wine ageing, this has been the case since 2006. This is for « vin de pays » as well as AOC wines. However, some AOC don't allow it. Chips usage should be noted in your cellar-book. Powder is not permitted within the European Union. Please, check your country's regulation.

Which chips can I use and when ?

Untoasted chips or light toasts are recommended during Alcoholic Fermentation. Medium and heavy toasts are usually used during ageing. When starting A.F., chips or powder can be added to the must or juice. The woody character is deep and subtle. Oak tannins will help stabilize the color and fix the fruit aromas of red wine. At the end of the A.F, wood pieces will give your wines aromatic complexity and add structure. During ageing, chips allow flexibility and permit the winemaker to monitor the development of oak character. With a blend of medium and heavy toasts, you can emulate cask ageing. Using chips several weeks before bottling will quickly give a hint of oak to your finished wine.

What are untoasted chips?

Untoasted chips are made from dried wood as opposed to green wood. They are made from wood that is air dried outdoors for a minimum of 18 months. They are used during A.F. because they are very rich in tannins.

Which sizes do I choose?

We produce six sizes : powder P, 3 sizes of chips (extra-small XS, small S, medium M), cubes and blocks. The size has an influence on the speed of extraction due to the surface and volume ratio. The faster extraction rate of the small chips makes them more suitable for use during A.F.

What are the different chip toasts ?

The different toasts develop different aromas and flavours in the oak. The light and medium toasts will taste more like vanilla, while the heavy toast will develop smoked or grilled characteristics. It can be interesting to combine different toasts when trying to achieve the complexity of aromas and flavours that are offered by oak barrels.



What is the usual dosage ?

We would suggest a dosage rate between 0,5 and 10 g of wood pieces per liter according to the maturity of the wine, the wine structure and the intensity of the oak character required. The doses should be greater during fermentation than for ageing wine.

Are wood chips only useful in bringing aromas to the wine ?

No. Besides the liberation of wood aromas such as vanilla, coffee, toffee, toast, oak gives tannins which combine with the anthocyanes of the red wine, so, that its color is deeper and more stable. Moreover, these tannins protect the wine against oxidation. Another effect is that chips increase mouth-feel. A further advantage is that they develop sweetness, without the addition of sugar.



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My wine has a distinct sawdust taste after just a few days in contact with the wood chips. Is this normal?

Yes. The extraction of compounds in the wood, and in particular the aromatic ones, is faster with wood chips than with barrels, so the wine quickly takes on woody and toasted flavours. After extraction of the chips the wine should be left for a "harmonisation" period of a month or two so that these characteristics meld into the wine. However, if this is accompanied by a dryness of the wine in the mouth, the chips should be removed. This dryness will disappear with ageing, or through oenological treatment.



How do I store my chips before usage, or once the bag has been opened?

If you store them away from light and humidity, your chips will retain their characteristics. Above all, do not store them near strong smelling products (gasoline, solvents, varnish, garlic...), chemicals or any source of heat.

Can I use chips in barrels ?

Yes, you can. After two or three vintages, barrels are less rich in aromatic compounds. Adding chips to your « old » barrels can be a way to rejuvenate them. Arôbois has developed and sells ready to use « infusettes » for barrels (225g) guaranteeing ease of use.



Are there any differences between using loose chips and infusion bags ?

No, there aren't. Both give the same results. It is just easier to remove the chips when using infusion bags. Arôbois advises you to tie the bag in the bottom of the tank just before adding juice or grapes so as to prevent the bag from rising.

Can I re-use the chips, cubes and blocks?

No, you can't. As chips are relatively thin, the wine quickly penetrates the entire chip and extracts all the aromatic compounds, in a lesser time frame than that of the barrel stave. This means that you cannot re-use chips. But cubes and blocks can be re-used provided that they are cleaned and stored in correct conditions.

Why choose Arôbois'chips?

Just try them and you will taste the difference!

Our chips are not just a by-product for us, they are our sole product to which we have dedicated all our energy and knowledge since 1997. Our chips are made from new oak of cooperage grade and are free of bark and sapwood. Before processing, the wood is naturally seasoned in the open air for a minimum of 18 months. It is then chipped and screened in order to eliminate incompatible sizes. So as to guarantee traceability from the supply of raw wood right through to the finished product, each bag/box we ship is numbered, allowing us to retrace critical data: the origin of the wood, air-drying time, toasting date etc

We have a very strict quality policy that starts with the raw wood sourcing and we have organised our Quality Management System according to **ISO 9001-2008 standards** . This system as well as our **HACCP quality system** is recognized by Moody International.



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