



Glass vs. Plastic Carboys – Which is Better?

Does it really make a difference?

There seems to be a lot of debate among home winemakers these days about the type of carboy that should be used during fermentation and aging. Are glass carboys better than plastic ones? Or is it just the opposite? Most importantly, does it really matter?

YES... there is a difference... and Vintner's Cellar hopes to illustrate why there is a clear choice when it comes to selecting the type of carboy to use.

When all the evidence is weighed (see below), the choice appears to be obvious. Despite this evidence, the selection of one type of carboy over another may have little to do with the facts; for many winemakers, it simply boils down to a matter of preference.



Glass Carboys in use at Vintner's Cellar

Comparison Chart

Use the chart below to see (in bulleted format) the advantages and disadvantages of glass vs plastic carboys:

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Glass Carboy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can see what's happening during fermentation and clearing Glass is easier to clean and sanitize than plastic Glass is impervious to scratching during normal cleaning routine Easier to get a good airlock seal Glass is inert; no chemicals or solvents to leach out Little or no oxidation occurs to wine during long term storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glass is breakable and thus more dangerous to handle (slippery when wet) Glass is heavier than plastic Sunlight through clear glass can harm wine

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Plastic Carboy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic carboys are cheaper to purchase than glass carboys • Safer to handle and lightweight. If dropped, there's no broken glass! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to monitor wine during fermentation and clearing • Very easy to scratch surface while cleaning; even microscopic scratches can harbour bacteria that will ruin wine • Plastic is much more apt to harbour off tastes, odors, etc. • Plastic carboys may tend to make wine more difficult to clear • More difficult to get a good airtight seal • Oxygen diffusion across barrier more likely during long term storage. <i>Can you say vinegar?</i> • Depending upon the source, plastic carboys may leach solvents when filled with acidic or alcoholic fluids • When carboys are lifted, the bottom may deform (pooch out) and draw in the water from the airlock

Explanations

It's simple...Glass is easier to clean and keep clean than plastic. And, because it's clear, it's easy to see if there is any film or gunk on the inside of the carboy. Plastic is easier to scratch during the cleaning process, and in these microscopic cuts or gouges, harmful bacteria and other nasties can hide, waiting to pounce on your next batch wine and ruin it. Even if not scratches, plastic contains microscopic pores that can harbour the same harmful elements.

Ask any amateur winemaker...the number one reason why wine "goes south" is a lack of proper sanitation. Having a carboy made of glass is your best insurance against this common problem, since it is so easy to clean.

Glass is not porous to oxygen like plastic. In the scenario of bulk aging wine in a plastic carboy, you'd really want to keep a close eye on the oxygen levels...we've all heard stories of wine turning to vinegar because so much O₂ was able to diffuse across the plastic barrier.

Glass does not harbour "off" odors and tastes like plastic can. *Try this experiment:* put something smelly (like anchovies or sardines) in a sealed Rubbermaid or food grade plastic

container, and also put a portion in a covered glass dish. After a period of time (week to a month, which would simulate aging in a carboy), remove the smelly stuff and wash each container as well as possible. Despite repeated washings, you'll still be able to smell the remnants of the substance in and around the plastic container, but not in the case of the glass dish or bowl. Imagine accidentally imparting an odor like that to your wine because you used a plastic carboy!

Conclusion

Even though plastic carboys are safer to handle and won't break, we believe that the advantages of glass - most notably those that ensure your wine won't be tainted - is more than enough evidence to convince the amateur winemaker which vessel is most appropriate to use in the winemaking process.

This is why *Vintner's Cellar* recommends, uses (and sells only) glass carboys for fermentation and bulk aging.

Source: www.grapestompers.com