

Wine gadgets

NEED TO KNOW

Usually a corkscrew and some glasses are the only kit needed to enjoy a bottle of wine. But sometimes you have to treat the wine correctly to get the best out of it, so we tested gadgets that help to chill wine or let it breathe.

CORKSCREWS

A cheap and cheerful manual corkscrew might be acclaimed as the best choice by the wine industry but it's hardly going to be a talking point at dinner. So we asked 13 wine drinkers, including two with impaired grip, to test a range of upmarket corkscrews in their homes, by using each corkscrew to open four bottles.

There are many types of corkscrew. For example, electric models have power-assisted corkscrew movement to make them easier to insert. Gas-powered corkscrews push a pin into the stopper and release gas into the bottle, which forces the cork out. Upmarket corkscrews often include a foil cutter to remove the seal.

CHILLERS

An electric chiller is a quick way to cool bottles down to the right temperature, which is 5°C for white wines and 20°C for reds.

BREATHERS

Aerating a wine releases flavour and aroma. A wine breather does this by sucking in air and then releasing it, through a small pipe, into the bottle.



BEST BUYS

All of the Best Buy corkscrews were a hit with the 13 test panel members because they are the easiest to pull corks with. They are also simple to screw in, feel comfortable during use, have good leverage and don't crumble the cork.

The corkscrews that didn't do well, on the other hand, are hard to insert, pull or remove from the cork.

Two corkscrews tied for the top spot. The **Screwpull (1)**, £119 from John Lewis, impresses in most areas. The separate foil cutter was the best we tried and required minimal effort to remove a seal. Pulling the cork is simple and removing it from the screw afterwards is easy. Our panellists agreed that the accompanying stand for holding the device was 'attractive and a useful addition'.

The other top scorer, which also comes with a presentation stand, is the **Trudeau (2)**, £65 online. It employs the same lever design as the Screwpull but is more comfortable to use and lighter. However, it is marginally less effective than the Screwpull and its foil cutter is slightly harder to use.

The **Vacuvin (3)**, £30 from independent retailers, is the cheapest of our Best Buys. It looks a bit complex at first, with its two sets of handles, but our panellists agreed that 'after the first cork, all the others were very simple'. Like the Screwpull, it excels at removing corks and plastic stoppers. Our only criticism is that its body shape makes it a bit bulky.

PRESENTATION BOXES

Some corkscrews, like this Screwpull, have display stands and presentation boxes; some also have spare screws. They are quite expensive, though – this Screwpull costs more than £100 – so the little touches of luxury really do add up.



DON'T BUY

Two of the corkscrews are Don't Buys. Although you can pull corks with both, our users were distinctly unimpressed by them.

The Original Fish (10) has a skeletal design in the shape of a fish. One panellist commented that it 'looks good in the box but is very disappointing' because it's so uncomfortable to use. Panellists who found it particularly tricky to use had to hold the bottle low down and exert great strength to remove the cork.

With a slightly lower score, the Suck UK (11) was the most difficult corkscrew on test to pull corks with, so, although a key ring corkscrew is a nice idea, we think you should avoid this one.



BEST BUY

2 Trudeau

EASY TO GRIP

The cleverly-designed lever handle on this Trudeau makes it an ideal corkscrew for someone who finds it hard to grip strongly. Little strength is needed to pull the cork and there were no problems removing the cork from the screw itself. It was a little cumbersome for small hands but, overall, comfortable and easy to use.



BEST BUY

3 Vacuvin

HANDLE

The small and fiddly handle of this Suck UK makes it difficult to twist the screw into corks and pull them out. One of the two panellists with impaired grip described it as 'impossible' to use. It also tended to disintegrate plastic stoppers and broke during the trial.



11 Suck UK

USING THE TABLE

We tested corkscrews that would make interesting gifts.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay. Online prices are in *italics*. **Power assisted** Corkscrews that use gas and electric power to help remove the cork.

Convenience

Ease of use How easily the corkscrew removed foil, and was inserted into and pulled out stoppers. **Poor grip** The verdict of our test panel members who have difficulty in gripping and lifting. **Overall** Includes ease of use plus an assessment of style, looks and accessories.

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
 Performance 65%
 Convenience 35%

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ●
 Best —————> Worst
 ■ Best Buy ■ Don't Buy



10 The Original Fish

Corkscrews

Corkscrews	Spec		Performance			Convenience			Score (%)
	Price (£)	Power assisted	Removing seal	Screwing in	Pulling	Ease of use	Poor grip	Overall	
CORKSCREWS									
1 Screwpull Elegance	119		★	★	★	★	☆	☆	82
2 Trudeau Trulever	65		☆	★	★	★	★	★	82
3 Vacuvin Winemaster	30		☆	★	★	☆	☆	☆	80
4 BarCraft Power Octopus	17		☆	★	☆	☆	★	☆	78
5 BarCraft Connoisseur	20		○	☆	☆	☆	○	○	67
6 Cork Pops Legacy	23	gas	○	☆	○	●	●	○	53
7 Screwpull Table Model	15		●	○	☆	○	●	○	49
8 Oz Clarke Electric	20	electric	○	○	○	●	●	●	45
9 Powerpush	18	gas	○	○	●	●	●	●	40
10 The Original Fish	20		●	●	●	●	●	●	25
11 Suck UK Pocket	15		●	●	●	●	●	●	24

Chillers

We tested three chillers in the laboratory to see how quickly they cooled white wine from room temperature (around 20°C) to a serving temperature of about 5°C. We also checked how well the chillers kept the bottles at the correct temperature.

The easy-to-use Maytag was by far the best: it takes only six minutes to cool a bottle to the desired temperature. Another bonus is that you can rapidly cool cans and soft drinks, too. It was the only chiller we considered recommending, but it had two significant drawbacks. This model spins bottles to ensure even cooling, but the motion tears the labels (you can cool without spinning but it takes more than ten minutes). You also have to fill it with 20 ice cubes before cooling.

The Princess Silver Wine Cooler also needs to be filled with ice cubes before use. This model takes ten minutes to chill a bottle and is drip-free due to the bottle's upright position. It's harder to use than the Maytag because its controls are difficult to read.

Unlike the other two chillers, you don't have to fill the Oz Clarke Wine Chiller with ice. However, if you're partial to opening the odd bottle on impulse, this model isn't for you. We put a bottle of wine into the chiller and, after five hours, we were still waiting for it to cool. When we tested this product it was labelled as a chiller, but its primary job is to keep pre-chilled bottles cold. It's now being marketed as a wine server instead.



Maytag



Princess



Oz Clarke

Breathers

Wine breathers aerate wine to release flavour and aroma. We asked wine expert Susy Atkins for her views on the Rouge O2 and Air au Vin models. Both cost around £10 online.

'The breathers are easy to set up, quick to use and clean. I tested tannic, full-bodied Chilean and Australian reds that benefit from breathing. Both worked – after aerating, the wines had a slightly fuller aroma, and a softer and more mellow, flavour-packed finish, rather than a "tight", chewy, closed finish. However it wasn't, in either case, a dramatic change,' she told us.

'I would also emphasise that, contrary to the marketing hype on the packaging of these products that says most bottles of wine need to breathe before serving, in my view aeration is useful only for full-bodied reds and some powerful whites. So I think that these claims are exaggerated.'

Cheaper wines don't need to breathe, as they are made to taste mellow when opened.

WINE TIPS

● You don't have to spend a fortune on a bottle of wine but the cheapest ones are, generally, not as good as those which cost more than a fiver.

● When matching food and wine, go for 'like with like' by pairing rich wines with rich food, such as creamy fish or chicken. Light, crisp styles go best with salads or canapés.



● Don't be a cork snob – try a bottle with a screw-cap or plastic stopper. Many premium wines are packaged this way.

● Try new grape varieties or wine styles. There are many exciting wines out there.

Air au Vin

Rouge O2

