

Summertime in Southwest Germany: Vineyards and Orchards

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If you drive one hour east from the region of Alsace France, across the Rhine River into Germany, you will discover a hidden gem of natural beauty known as the Schwabisch Alps.

These Alps are gentle rolling hills, not much higher than 3300 feet, forested and covered with vineyards, bordered to the North by the Neckar River, the Danube River to the South East and the Black Forest to the Southwest.

Stuttgart and Ulm are the major cities of the region. This region does not receive the hoards of tourists who visit Munich and the Bavarian Alps. But instead, it draws hikers and walkers, people who like to visit the Baroque and Medieval castles which dot the hilltops, and stop at a local vineyard or beer garden for a quiet meal with the locals.

I have visited this region many times, beginning in 1986. I fell in love with it then, and credit it with my interest in, and love of, gardening.

Everywhere you walk, even in the urban areas of Stuttgart, tiny plots of gardens are converted to growing flowers and food. Naturally, the typical window flower boxes abound, but roses, butterfly bushes, climbing vines are typically crammed into a 12 by 12 area, alongside tomatoes vines, strawberries and sweet peas.

Fruit trees abound: fresh cherries, blueberries, apples and plums. A typical summer drink is called Most...pronounced mowscht. It is a fermented apple cider made from Granny Smith apples, a local favorite-tart not sweet like most ciders-and at 6% alcohol content, it is considered an apple wine, and served at most vineyards in the region. However, the region is famous for its summer wine, a light, fruity, low

acidity wine called " Trollinger " or as English tourists say "Trolley". At 11.5%, it is easy on the palate but hard on the head.

Viticulture has been important to the region since the 8th century, when French monks from Burgundy moved to the region and started to grow grapes. "Trollinger" grapes have been grown here since. The name is believed to derive from "Tyrol" in Northern Italy, and locals say that the Romans brought this wine and grapes to the area around the time of Christ.

It is a very light summer table wine, popular with locals and tourists alike, and the hills around the small towns are lined with vineyards with walking paths for locals and tourists.

This part of Germany enjoys a moderate climate, though the valleys in the region experience a micro climate of hot days and cool evenings. Surrounded by rivers, there is an abundant water supply for the vineyards. The limesone-based soil here has been traditionally poor for agriculture, but where vineyards and orchards flourish, the locals have learned how to turn lemons into lemonade, or in this case ...wine!

