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England's winemakers promise a corking year

English vineyards are preparing for a record 10 million bottle harvest after weeks of dry, hot weather across the country (Sean O'Neill writes).

Sales of homegrown wines are also booming, with patriotic drinkers popping bottles of English fizz to toast a summer that has

brought a royal wedding and an unexpected World Cup adventure. The bumper harvest is being predicted after a heatwave that has caused healthy bunches to form early.

Stephen Skelton, a viticulture consultant, said: "Last week I thought we were looking at 8.5 million bottles but from what I've seen in vineyards this week I

think 9.5 million bottles is quite possible."

The average for the past five years has been about 5 million bottles and the highest harvest was 6.3 million in 2014.

There are now more than 500 vineyards in England and Wales, up 15 per cent since 2015, and British wines are winning plaudits around the world. Nyetimber's Cherie Spriggs won the

International Wine Challenge sparkling winemaker of the year award this week. It is the first vineyard from outside

Champagne to receive the accolade.

This year's excitement is in stark contrast to last

year, when a severe spring frost devastated vines, although optimism is still hedged by caution.

At the Bolney estate in West Sussex, Nick Hutchinson says the grapes have had "probably their best start to the year ever" but added: "We will need some rain because 80 per cent of the grape is water. A bit of normal English rain would do."

Bob Lindo, of the Camel Valley vineyard in Cornwall, said: "We're experiencing fantastic conditions — it's going to be a bumper harvest."

A little perspective is required. A 10 million bottle harvest sounds remarkable, but the Champagne region produces more than 300 million bottles per year. Italy recorded 5.5 billion bottles last year, which was a bad one.





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Bob Lindo and his son, Sam, of the Camel Valley vineyard in Cornwall, say that they are expecting a bumper harvest