

California Grape Varieties

The following is a list of California grape varieties that are available each fall starting in September.

RED GRAPE VARIETIES

ALICANTE BOUSHET

Alicante Bouschet is a wine grape variety that has been widely cultivated since 1866. It is a cross of Grenache with Petit Bouschet (itself a cross of the very old variety Teinturier du Cher and Aramon). Alicante is a teinturier, a grape with red flesh. It is the only teinturier grape that belongs to the *Vitis vinifera* family. It's deep color makes it useful for blending with light red wine. It was planted heavily during Prohibition in California for export to the East Coast. This grape makes a dry, dark, full bodied wine.

BARBERA

Barbera is believed to have originated in the hills of Monferrato in central Piemonte, Italy where it has been known from the thirteenth century. In California, Barbera is one of the most successful of the Piemontese grapes to be adapted in the state, with over 8000 acres of plantings. This grape produces a red, deep colored, full bodied wine and produces a dry somewhat tannic wine that ages well and softens with time. When young, the wines offer a very intense aroma of fresh red and blackberries. In the lightest versions notes of cherries, raspberries and blueberries and with notes of blackberry and black cherries in wines made of more ripe grapes. Oaking this wine provides for increased complexity, aging potential, and hints of vanilla notes.

BLACK MALVASIA

The Malvasia family of grapes are of ancient origin, most likely originating in Greece, but now grown in many of the winemaking regions of the world. Black Malvasia is a red wine variety that is used primarily as a blending grape being valued for the dark color and aromatic qualities it can add to a wine. Black Malvasia in Italy is used as a blending partner with Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese. Black Malvasia wines are characterized by a richness and chocolate notes.

CABERNET FRANC

Cabernet Franc is believed to have been established in the Libournais region of southwest France sometime in the 17th century. Cabernet Franc shares many of the same phenolic and aroma compounds as Cabernet Sauvignon but with some noticeable differences. Cabernet Franc tends to be more lightly pigmented and produces wines with the same level of intensity and richness. Cabernet Franc tends to have a more pronounced perfume with notes of raspberries, black currants, violets and graphite. It is often characterized by a green, vegetal strike that can range from leaves to green bell peppers. It has slightly less tannins than Cabernet Sauvignon and tends to produce a wine with a smoother mouth feel.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the most widely planted grape varieties in the world. Wine made from Cabernet Sauvignon is generally stronger than Merlot and full flavored. The Cabernet Sauvignon grape has a thick skin that results in wines that can be high in tannin which provides structure and the ability to age. This grape is strongly associated with the red wines of

Bordeaux and is blended with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. The aroma of Cabernet Sauvignon has been described as chocolate, ripe jammy berries, oak, pepper, earth, violets, blackcurrant, spice, and cedar.

CARIGNANE

Carignane is a grape that originated in Spain and was later transplanted to the New World. Carignane is predominately used in blending with Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Mourvedre, and Merlot. This grape is noted for high alcohol, high tannins, and a deep purple color.

GRENACHE

Grenache is one of the most widely planted red wine grape varieties in the world. It is generally spicy, berry-flavored and soft on the palate with a relatively high alcohol content, but it needs careful control of yields for best results. It tends to lack acid, tannin and color, and is usually blended with other varieties such as Syrah and Carignane. Grenache is also used to make rosé wines in France and Spain and the high sugar levels of Grenache have led to extensive use in fortified wines such as Port.

MERLOT

Merlot is a red wine grape that is used as both a blending grape and for varietal wines. Merlot based wines usually have medium body with hints of berry, plum, and currant. Its softness and "fleshiness", combined with its earlier ripening, makes Merlot a popular grape for blending with the sterner, later-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon, which tends to be higher in tannin. Along with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot, Merlot is one of the primary grapes in Bordeaux wine where it is the most widely planted grape.

MOURVEDRE

Mourvedre is variety of wine grape used to make both strong, dark red wines and rosés. It is an international variety grown in many regions around the world. Mourvedre produces tannic wines that can be high in alcohol, and is most successful in Rhone-style blends. It has a particular affinity for Grenache, softening it and giving it structure. Its taste varies greatly according to area, but often has a wild, gamey or earthy flavor, with soft red fruit flavors.

NEBBIOLO

Nebbiolo is one of the most important wine grape varieties in Italy's Piedmont region and is used to make Barolo and Barbaresco. Wine made from the Nebbiolo grape generally have strong tannins and high acidity. Aromas have been described as tar, roses, and camphor with flavors of mint, plum, and licorice.

PETITE SIRAH

Petite Sirah is a variety of red wine grape primarily grown in California, Australia, France, and Israel. Petite Sirah is also called Durif. These grapes produce a deep colored, robust, peppery wine that packs plenty of tannin and has good aging ability. Compared to Syrah, the wine is noticeably more dark and purplish in color.

PETIT VERDOT

Petit Verdot is a variety of red wine grape, principally used in classic Bordeaux blends. It ripens much later than the other varieties in Bordeaux, often too late, so it fell out of favor in its home region. When it does ripen, it is added in small amounts to add tannin, color and flavor to the blend. It has attracted attention among winemakers in the New World, where it ripens more

reliably and has been made into single varietal wine. It is also useful in 'stiffening' the mid palate of Cabernet Sauvignon blends.

PINOTAGE

Pinotage was developed in South Africa and is its signature grape variety. It was bred there in 1925 as a cross between Pinot Noir and Cinsaut. It typically produces deep red wines with smoky, bramble and earthy flavors, sometimes with notes of bananas and tropical fruit. Pinotage is often blended, and also made into fortified wine and even red sparkling wine.

PINOT NOIR

The name is derived from the French words for "pine" and "black" alluding to the varietals' tightly clustered dark purple pine cone-shaped bunches of fruit. Originally from France where it is used in all of the great red burgundies. This grape produces a wine that is clear, brilliant, and medium to deep red in color. It is rich, velvety, and full of flavors such as cherries, raspberries, and strawberries.

RUBY CABERNET

Ruby Cabernet is a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Carignane created in 1936 by Dr Harold Olmo at UC Davis in California. Ruby Cabernet can produce wines with good color and a pleasant cherry flavor and is also used in blending.

SANGIOVESE

Sangiovese appears to have originated in Tuscany, where it was known by the 16th century but has been widely planted in California. At least fourteen Sangiovese clones exist, of which Brunello is one of the best regarded. It is most famous as the main component of the Chianti blend in Tuscany. Young Sangiovese has fresh fruity flavors of strawberry and a little spiciness, but it readily takes on oaky, even tarry, flavors when aged in barrels.

SYRAH

Wines made from Syrah are often full bodied with aromas ranging from violets to berries, chocolate, espresso and black pepper. Syrah is widely used to make a dry red table wine and is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Grenache, Mourvedre, and Viognier. Syrah is also called Shiraz in Australia, South Africa, and Canada.

TEMPRANILLO

Tempranillo is native to Spain and is the main grape used in Rioja. The grape makes a full-bodied red wine which can be consumed young. Tempranillo wines can be also be aged in oak and the best are ruby red in color, with aromas and flavors of berries, plum, tobacco, vanilla, leather and herb.

VALDEPENA

The Valdepena grape is thick skinned and deep red in color. Wines produced from these grapes tend to be medium to deep red. Aromas have been described as leather, tobacco, vanilla, and earthy.

ZINFANDEL

Zinfandel is a variety of red grape planted in over 10 percent of California vineyards. The grapes typically produce a robust red wine. The grapes can have a high sugar content which will ferment into a high level of alcohol. Styles include: a light spicy flavor with a berry-like aroma, or a full-bodied, oak aged, berry-like, dark colored.

WHITE GRAPE VARIETIES

ALBARINO

Albarino is a variety of white wine grape originally grown in Galicia (northwest Spain) and Monçao (northwest Portugal), where it is used to make varietal white wines. Albarino has been thought to originate from the Alsace region of France. The grape is noted for its distinctive aroma, very similar to that of Viognier, Gewurztraminer, and Petit Manseng, suggesting apricot and peach. The wine produced is unusually light, and generally high in acidity with alcohol levels of 11.5-12.5%

CHARDONNAY

Chardonnay originated in the Burgundy wine region of eastern France but is now grown wherever wine is produced, from England to New Zealand. Chardonnay flavors have been described as citrus and melon and are made with and without barrel aging. Chardonnay is also produced using malolactic fermentation which imparts a buttery flavor. Chardonnay is a versatile grape producing a soft, fruity wine without oak aging and aromas of smoke, vanilla, and caramel with barrel aging.

CHENIN BLANC

Chenin Blanc originated in the Loire Valley of France. Its high acidity means it can be used to make everything from sparkling wines to well-balanced dessert wines. Chenin Blanc when vinified as a dry wine can distinguish itself as a single varietal wine with flavors of quince and apples or it can add acidity as a blending component.

FRENCH COLOMBARD

French Colombard is possibly the offspring of Gouais Blanc and Chenin blanc. This grape provides backbone, due to its natural acidic character, for white blends. French Colombard can produce a crisp, moderately dry, spicy wine.

GEWURZTRAMINER

Gewurztraminer is an aromatic wine grape variety with a pink to red skin color. The variety has high natural sugar and the wines are white and usually off-dry, with a flamboyant bouquet of lychees. Dry Gewurztraminers may also have aromas of roses, passion fruit and floral notes

MUSCAT ALEXANDRIA

The Muscat family of grapes is widely grown for wine, raisins, and table grapes. Colors range from white to almost black, but almost always have a pronounced sweet floral aroma. Muscat is perhaps the oldest domesticated grape varieties due to the breadth and number of varieties. Wine made from Muscat Alexandria tend to be sweet with an earthy taste. It is not particularly aromatic.

MUSCAT CANELLI

Muscat Canelli is also called Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains and Moscato Bianco. Its name comes from its characteristic small berry size and tight clusters. While technically a white grape, there are strains of vines that produce berries that are pink or reddish brown. Muscat Canelli produces outstanding sweet dessert wines and also forms the basis of Asti Spumante.

MUSCAT ORANGE

Muscat Orange is a unique variety of Muscat grape. Orange Muscat generally appears as a dessert wine and is grown in California and Australia. True to its name, wine made from this grape has an aroma of orange blossom and apricot.

PINOT GRIGIO

Pinto Grigio also known as Pinot Gris is thought to be a mutant clone of Pinto Noir. Pinot Grigio usually has grayish-blue fruit but can also have a brownish pink, black, or even white appearance. The grapes grow in pinecone shaped clusters and wines produced from these grapes vary in color from light shades of pink to copper to a deep golden yellow. The grape grows best in cool climates, and matures relatively early with high sugar levels. This can lead to either a sweeter wine, or, if fermented to dryness, a wine high in alcohol.

RIESLING (JOHANNISBERG)

Riesling is grown historically in Germany, The Alsace region of France, Austria, and northern Italy. Riesling can be produced into dessert wines by late harvest, through evaporation caused by the fungus Botrytis Cinera or "noble rot", or by freezing (ice wine). These wines have high sugar content, high acid, with great flavor. Rieslings are also made into non-dessert wines that range from dry to sweet. Some have crisp lightness with detectable peach aromas. Riesling's naturally high acidity and range of flavors make it suitable for extended aging.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

The Sauvignon Blanc grape originated in the Bordeaux region of France and has a green skin. The grape can produce crisp, dry, and refreshing white varietal wines. Sauvignon Blanc also is a component of the dessert wines Sauterne and Barsac. Sauvignon Blanc's from California tend to be either one of two styles. The first a fruity styles with tropical fruit undertones or a barrel-aged style with rounder melon notes.

THOMPSON SEEDLESS

Thompson Seedless is the most widely planted white table grape grown in California and is primarily raised for raisin production. Thompson Seedless makes a sweet table wine.

VIIGNIER

Viognier is believed to have been brought to the Rhone region of France by the Romans and to have originated in Dalmatia. The best Viognier wines are known for their powerful fruit and floral aromas. Viognier typically produces medium bodied wines with relatively high acid content. This wine is best drunk young since aging allows the fruit and aromatic strength of Viognier to fade away.

WHITE MALVASIA (MALVASIA BIANCA)

The White Malvasia grape is thought originally to be of Greek origin. The grape is used to produce white table wine, dessert wines, and fortified wines as well as in blending. White Malvasia grapes can produce dry wines with tastes of peach and aromas of musk and almonds with good acidity. White Malvasia as a sweet wine can have a nutty character.