

NERO D'AVOLA

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BACKGROUND

Nero d'Avola (pronounced nero DAHVOLLAH) is widely grown in Sicily, particularly in the provinces of Agrigento, Siracusa, Caltanissetta and Ragusa. It is also grown to a lesser extent in Calabria, where it is known as Calabrese. The variety has been grown for centuries in Sicily and is presumed to have originated from close to the town of Avola, in the south-east of the island. In recent decades, its wines have become more reputed to such an extent that the Italian Wine and Food Society have included it in its top 12 red wine varieties of Italy. Nero d'Avola is the principal variety of the only DOCG wine of Sicily, Cerasuolo di Vittoria, for which it must be 60% of the blend with Frappato. There may now be 19,000 hectares of Nero in Sicily. Synonyms include Cappuciu Nero, Calabrese d'Avola, Calabrese de Calabria, Calabrese di Noto, Calabrese Dolce, Calabrese Nero, Calabrese Pittatello, Calabrese Pizuto, Calabrese Pizzutello, Calabrese Pizzuto, Calabrisi d'Avola and Fekete Calabriai. In Australia, there are currently at least five wine producers—but many more growers.

VITICULTURE

Budburst and maturity are mid-season (approximately two weeks after Chardonnay in Sicily). Vines are very vigorous. Bunches are well-filled to compact, moderate to large, and yield is moderate to high. In Sicily where irrigation is permitted, a good yield is considered to be 9t/ha. Berries are purplish-black, and small to medium in size. It performs well in a hot, dry climate and has been successful with 1103 Paulsen as a rootstock in Sicily (140 Ruggeri can induce excessive vigour). Traditionally grown as bush vines, Nero d'Avola is now more likely to be trellised. Although spur pruning is often used, basal bud fertility is not high, so cane pruning may also be used. It is susceptible to powdery and downy mildews.

WINE

In Sicily, Nero d'Avola is used as a component in blends and for varietal wines, from light easy-drinking styles to big, full-bodied reds. It blends well with other varieties, e.g. indigenous grapes such as Frappato and Nerello Mascalese, or introduced varieties such as Merlot. Wines are well-coloured, medium- to full-bodied with good acidity and tannins and a velvety, smooth taste. Flavour descriptors include plum jam, dark cherry, raspberry, hazelnut, fresh herbs, spice and chocolate. It has been likened to full-bodied Australian Shiraz.

This is an extract from the manual developed for the Research to Practice on 'Alternative varieties: emerging options for a changing environment' (Tassie, L.; Dry, P.R. and Essling, M. 2010). For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Dr Mardi Longbottom (rtp@awri.com.au; tel. 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of this Research to Practice program in your region.