

TINTO CÃO

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BACKGROUND

Tinto Cão (*TEEN-tah KAY-oh*) is an old variety from northern Portugal, known since the 17th century. Total planted area in Portugal is approximately 300ha, mainly in the Douro, with a lesser area in the Dão. New plantings have been made in Estremadura and Setubal. Tinto Cão is considered to be one of the most important varieties in the Douro for port, both for quality and contribution to the blend, but it has never been widely planted—probably because of low yield. Today it is also used in blended red wines from Douro and Dão. Synonyms are Farmenta and Tinta Cão. According to recent DNA research, it could be related to both Viosinho and Tinta Francisca. It is also one of the parents of the red-juiced Rubired. There is a very small area of Tinto Cão in California. In Australia, it is used for port-style and table wines with currently 20 wine producers in WA (Margaret River, Peel, Swan), SA (McLaren Vale, Riverland), Vic. (Rutherglen, Yarra Valley) and NSW (Mudgee, Riverina).

VITICULTURE

Budburst is mid-season and ripening is late. Bunches are small, loose and berries are medium, dark-blue or black with thick skin and heavy bloom. Vigour is high and growth habit is semi-erect. In Portugal yield is said to be low and uniform. Bud fertility is good and spur pruning can be used although cane pruning is most common in Portugal. It is sensitive to drought but tolerant of heat with low susceptibility to sunburn. Harvest can be fully mechanised. It is tolerant of *Botrytis* bunch rot due to its loose bunch and tough skin but has moderate susceptibility to powdery and downy mildews.

WINE

Quality is variable: good if fruit can achieve full ripeness (at least 13.5-14.0°Brix). Such wines have moderate colour, medium to high acidity, blackcurrant and strawberry fruits with well-rounded tannins. Inadequate maturity inevitably leads to thin wines with poor colour and vegetative characters. This variety does not achieve high quality every year in the Douro. It is much better suited to blending than to varietal wine.

For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (viticulture@awri.com.au; tel. 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.