

# ALBARIÑO

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## BACKGROUND

Albariño (ahl-bah-REEN-yo), or Alvarinho, originated in Galicia, in north-west Spain, or in northern Portugal. The high degree of phenotypical diversity of Albariño in north-west Iberia suggests that it is an old variety. In Spain, both Albariño and Albarin Blanco (a different variety) have been mistaken for Savagnin (Blanc)—but they are not related, based on DNA analysis. It is possible that there is some Savagnin grown as Albariño in Galician vineyards. Synonyms include Albelleiro, Alvarin Blanco, Azal blanco, Galego, Galeguinho and Paderña. Alvarinho is the preferred international prime name. From just 200 hectares in the mid-1980s, Spain now has 3500ha, nearly all in Galicia and particularly in the Rias Baixas DO. There has also been much recent expansion in Portugal (960ha), where it is more widely planted: mainly in the Minho in the north, but also further south in Ribatejo, Dao and Setubal. There are small areas in Uruguay, Argentina, USA (52ha in California where it was planted in the early 2000s; Oregon, Washington and Virginia) and New Zealand (first planted in 2009 with clones sourced from Portugal). Most people in the Australian wine industry are aware that the initial introduction of Albariño to Australia was actually Savagnin. True Albariño has been introduced in recent years.

## VITICULTURE

Budburst is early to mid-season (two weeks after Chardonnay in California) and ripening is early (similar to Chardonnay in California). Bunches are small and compact with small thick-skinned berries. Vigour is high. Yield is low to moderate. Spur pruning can be used, although cane pruning is most common. It is tolerant of Botrytis bunch rot due to its tough skin, but susceptible to powdery and downy mildews. Bunches are sensitive to sunburn and it is prone to 'second crop'. It is adapted to sites with fertile soils and high growing season rainfall. In north-west Iberia it has been traditionally grown on an expansive pergola system, but there are now some newer vineyards with VSP.

## WINE

In Spain, most Albariño wine is single variety. In Portugal, Albariño is often blended with Loureiro (a close relative) and Trajadura—as in the Vinho Verde DOC. It may also be used for sparkling wine. The best wines are aromatic, combining fruity and floral characters, have fresh acidity and firm structure. Descriptors include orange blossom, honeysuckle, apricot, peach, pome fruit and melon. If harvested at relatively low Brix, there is more citrus with crisp freshness; at higher Brix, wines are more like Viognier with apricot and peach characters and full body.

*For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (marcel.essling@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.*



**Albariño in the vineyard owned by Doug and Delwyn Bell and located just outside of Gisborne.**