

MONTEPULCIANO

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BACKGROUND

Montepulciano (MON-tay-pull-CHAH-noh) is a red grape variety most likely of Italian origin—not Greek as claimed in some references. It has been confused with Sangiovese, perhaps because its name is the same as the hilltop town in Tuscany known for the wine DOCG *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* made from Sangiovese (syn. Prugnolo Gentile). DNA analysis has revealed that Montepulciano is not related to Sangiovese. Synonyms include Cordisco, Cordisio, Morellone, Premutico, Primaticcio, Primitivo, Primitico, Sangiovese Cordisco, Sangovetto, Torre di Passeri and Uva Abruzzese. There are approximately 35,000ha planted in Italy where it is mainly grown in the central regions, particularly Abruzzo and Marche. In the former region it makes up 55% of the planted area. Montepulciano is the main variety in Marche DOCs such as Rosso Conero (minimum 85%), Rosso Piceno (minimum 35-70%) and also used in several DOCs in Molise and Puglia. Outside of Italy, there are just tiny areas in Argentina, Brazil, USA and New Zealand. There are now more than 46 wine producers in Australia, from hot to cool regions, and mainly in South Australia (41ha).

VITICULTURE

Budburst and maturity are late. The medium bunches are compact to well-filled. The medium berries have a thick skin. It is vigorous with a semi-erect growth habit. Yield is moderate to high depending on clone. Montepulciano has a tendency to overcrop which may necessitate bunch thinning. In Australia it has proved to be both drought and heat tolerant and withstands prolonged heatwaves much better than any mainstream variety. In Italy, it is both spur- and cane-pruned but spur is most common in Australia. It has good tolerance of both botrytis bunch rot and downy mildew but is sensitive to powdery mildew.

WINE

Montepulciano is used for different wine styles from rosé to full-bodied reds. Wines are well-coloured and full-bodied with rich flavours and robust tannins, and age well. Descriptors include blackberry, cherry, mulberry, plum and earthiness. It is useful in blends with softer varieties.

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