

BARBERA

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BACKGROUND

Barbera (bah-BEH-rah) is a red grape variety said to have originated in central Piedmont, however, DNA analysis reveals that it has little relationship with other varieties of Piedmont. Therefore, its origin may have been elsewhere as a natural cross. The first reliable reference to Barbera was at the end of 18th century near Asti, but it did not become important in Piedmont until after the arrival of phylloxera. Nevertheless, it is now said to be most 'typical' variety of Piedmont, comprising one-third of the regional planted area. It is also prominent elsewhere in northern Italy (Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna), and a little is grown in the south. Synonyms include Barbera a Peduncolo Rosso, Barbera a Ruspo Verde, Barbera Amaro, Barbera d'Asti, Barbera Fina, Barbera Grossa, Barbera Nera, Barbera Nostrana, Barbera vera, Berberone, Gaietto, Lombardesca and Sciaa. Barbera Bianca and Barbera de Sannio are not genetically related. The global area of Barbera is 24,178ha (2010) of which 85% is in Italy—but there has been a significant decrease since the mid-1980s. California has 2798ha, where it has been popular since the 1970s, particularly in the hot inland San Joaquin Valley. It is also important in Argentina. There are small areas in Slovenia, Greece, Israel and South Africa. Australia has 116ha (2010) and at least 101 wine producers, mainly in the Hunter Valley, McLaren Vale, King Valley, Adelaide Hills and Barossa Valley.

VITICULTURE

Budburst is early to mid-season and maturity is mid-season. Vigour is moderate with a semi-erect growth habit. Bunches are medium and can range from well-filled to compact with medium berries. Yield is moderate to high. Cane pruning is most often used in Italy but spur pruning is successful in Australia. Barbera is moderately susceptible to mildews and bunch rot.

WINE

Barbera wines have high acidity, good colour and tannin. Descriptors include spice, nutmeg, cherry, mulberry, plum, liquorice and freshness. It is used for both dry and sweet red wines and sparkling in Italy—best known in DOCG wines of Barbera d'Asti (allows up to 15% of Freisa, Grignolino or Dolcetto), and DOC wines Barbera d'Alba and Barbera di Monferrato. It is useful in blends for contribution of acidity.

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.