

DOLCETTO

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BACKGROUND

Dolcetto (doll-CHET-oh) literally means 'little sweet one'—perhaps a reference to its low berry acidity. It was first mentioned in the late 16th century in southern Piedmont, in north-west Italy, where it is widely grown—although the area under vine has declined in recent times at the expense of Barbera. Today it is most important in the provinces of Cuneo, Alessandria and Asti. Dolcetto is also grown in Liguria, Lombardy and Umbria. Synonyms include Nibièu, Nibiò (Lombardy, Piedmont) and Ormeasco (Piedmont, Liguria). The global area in 2010 was 6333ha (down 12% since 2000) of which Italy has 97%. In Piedmont, Dolcetto comprises 13% of the total planted area of Piedmont where it is used as a single variety in many DOCs, e.g., Asti, Alba, Langhe and Monferrato, and at least one DOCG, Dogliano. It is also authorised as a blending partner with Barbera in several Piedmont DOCs. There is also a white Dolcetto Bianco but this is not genetically related to the black-fruited Dolcetto. There is a small area in USA (California, Oregon and Washington). Dolcetto has been grown in Australia for many years; in the 1970s most of the so-called 'Malbec' in Victoria was discovered to be Dolcetto. Despite the small planted area, there are at least 40 wine producers in Australia, mainly in Victoria and SA (16.6ha).

VITICULTURE

Budburst is mid-season and maturity is early, thus making it suitable for the coolest sites in Piedmont where Barbera and Nebbiolo do not ripen satisfactorily. Vigour is moderate with semi-erect growth habit. Bunches are medium and well-filled to compact with small to medium berries. Yield is moderate and regular. Wines are said to lack intensity if yield is excessive. Spur pruning is used in Australia. Bunches are susceptible to bunch rot. There are at least seven clones available in Australia.

WINE

Dolcetto wines have medium colour with light to medium body, and are soft, round and fruity. They may be best consumed when young. Descriptors include cherry, liquorice, almonds, savoury and spice. Its unusual combination of low acidity and high tannin requires careful blending. Dolcetto is mainly used for varietal wines in Australia, but can also be a useful blending partner, e.g., with Barbera in Italy and Lagrein in Australia.

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.