

Souzao

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Background

Known as Souzao (and pronounced soo-ZOW) in Australia, this grape variety should probably be called Vinhão—because that is what it is known as in the Minho region of north-west Portugal where it appears to have originated. Vinhão is the main variety for red wines in the Minho. It was introduced to the Douro (where it is known as Sousão) at the end of the 18th century and the area planted has recently increased. DNA research has confirmed that Vinhão and Sousão are one and the same. The total area in Portugal is 2099ha (2010). In Spain (573ha) it is grown almost exclusively in Galicia—particularly Rias Baixas, Ribeiro and Valdeorras—where it is mainly used in blends and occasionally as a varietal. Synonyms include Espadeiro Basto, Espadeiro da Tinta, Espadeiro Preto, Negrão, Pinhão, Sousão, Souson (Galicia, Spain), Tinta Nacional, Tinta Pais (Galicia, Spain) and Tinto de Parada. In Australia it has been grown since the 1960s: there are at least nine wine producers in several regions (Margaret River, Peel, Swan District, Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale, Rutherglen, Mudgee) who mostly use it for table wines, both varietal and blends. There are small areas in South Africa and USA (California, Washington) where it is mainly used for fortified wines. There may only be one clone of Souzao in Australia at the present time—this was introduced from California in the 1960s.

Viticulture

Budburst and maturity are mid to late season. Vigour is moderate to high with sprawling growth habit. Bunches are small to medium, well-filled to compact with medium thick-skinned and highly coloured berries. Yield is moderate. Spur pruning can be used. Souzao has lower susceptibility to powdery and downy mildews than average but it is susceptible to sunburn.

Wine

Souzao is said to produce the most intensely-coloured wines in Portugal—even more intense than varieties with red flesh such as Alicante Bouschet. It is the basis of the best red table wines of the Vinho Verde. Descriptors include cherry and 'fruits of the forest'. In the Douro it is used in blends to add both colour and acidity.

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