





# Gamay Noir

## Synonyms

The many synonyms include Bourguignon noir, Petit Bourguignon, Gamay Beaujolais, and Petit Gamai in France, and Blauer Gamet in Germany. European Union legislation uses Gamay noir à jus blanc to avoid confusion among regions and reputed sources. There are a number of false Gamays found throughout the world. In California, they include Gamay Beaujolais, found to be a Pinot noir clone, and Napa Gamay, found to be Valdiguié.

## Source

Gamay noir is now known to be a cross of Pinot noir and the ancient white variety Gouais, the latter a Central European variety that was probably introduced to northeastern France by the Romans. Gamay noir was grown in Burgundy for a long time, possibly as far back as the third century. It is an important variety of the Burgundy-Beaujolais region and Loire Valley in France and Valais, Switzerland. Otherwise, plantings of the true Gamay noir are very limited, including in California. The first true Gamay noir was imported into California in 1973.

## Description

**Clusters:** small cylindrical; well-filled to compact; medium-size peduncles.

**Berries:** small to medium; short, oval shape; purple with bluish-white bloom.

**Leaves:** medium ; mostly entire with shallow lateral sinuses; V-shaped petiolar sinus; short, wide teeth; glabrous with few scattered hairs on lower leaf surface.

**Shoot tips:** downy, white tips; young leaves yellow with bronze-red highlights.

## Growth and Soil Adaptability

The vine is moderately vigorous with a semi-upright growth habit. Budbreak is fairly early, but the fruitfulness of secondary buds reduces its vulnerability to spring frost. Its early ripening characteristics are best suited to cool climate regions. There are no reported limitations of soil types, but hill-sides are often preferred to avoid highly productive, vigorous vines of lower fruit anthocyanins and tannins.

## Rootstocks

There are no reported incompatibilities. In France, Riparia rootstocks are often used in granitic soils, 3309C in clay or clay-and-limestone soils, and 41B in extremely chalky soils.

## clusters

*Small cylindrical; well-filled to compact; medium-size peduncles.*

## berries

*Small to medium; short, oval shape; purple with bluish-white bloom.*

## Clones

Earlier confusion about the true variety's presence and identity limited its importation and clonal diversity in California. Approximately 32 certified clones are registered in France, which is the origin of the material available in California. Gamay noir ENTAV-INRA® 358 is available as California certified stock. In addition, some generic French selections are available as California registered stock. According to data published in France, Gamay noir FPS 02 (French 221) is highly productive but of lower wine quality, Gamay noir FPS 03 (French 282) produces

well-balanced wines, Gamay noir FPS 05 (French 509) produces wines of superior quality, and Gamay noir FPS 07 (French 284) vines are of high fertility. However, no replicated trial data has verified these results under California conditions. Most of these selections have received tissue culture therapy for virus infections that were present when the clones were imported, which may have altered the selections' performance.

## Production

Gamay noir yields are moderate, averaging 4 to 7 tons per acre.

## Harvest

**Period:** An early season variety, harvested in mid-September to mid-October in cool districts.

**Method:** Hand harvestability is medium-hard due to the short, woody peduncle. The medium-size clusters aid harvester productivity. There is no reported California experience with machine harvest of this variety.



## leaves

*Medium; mostly entire with shallow lateral sinuses; V-shaped petiolar sinus; short, wide teeth; glabrous with few scattered hairs on lower leaf surface.*





## shoot tips

*Downy, white tips; young leaves yellow with bronze-red highlights.*

### Training and Pruning

Gamay noir is mostly pruned to bilateral cordons with 10 to 16 two-node spurs. Short pruning is universally recommended to avoid overcropping from the variety's high fertility of medium-size clusters.

### Trellising and Canopy Management

Vertical-shoot-positioned systems are preferred in the cooler districts to improve fruit anthocyanin and phenolic content and, in conjunction with leaf removal, to minimize bunch rot.

### Insect and Disease Problems

The variety is susceptible to fungal disease problems, including powdery mildew, *Phomopsis* cane and leaf spot, and *Botrytis* bunch rot. The compact clusters can contribute to bunch rot problems.

### Other Cultural Characteristics

Gamay noir has characteristics similar to, and is most often grown in the same manner as, Pinot noir. It is recommended for medium-fertility soils. Shot berries from cool weather during bloom can be a problem. Excessive cluster exposure can cause sunburn. Vigorous vines produce a large second crop.

### Winery Use

Because Gamay noir is traditionally used in light, fruity, uncomplicated red table wines for early consumption, a special fermentation process called carbonic maceration is common. Here the grapes are fermented whole with some pumping over to maximize pigments and minimize the tannins extracted from the skins. Beaujolais Nouveaux wines are largely made from this variety and vinification method. Red wines of more classical Burgundy style, as well as rosé wines, are also common to this variety.

—L. Peter Christensen