Malvasia Bianca

Synonyms
In France, the variety is known as Malvasia and Malvoisie; in Germany, it is called Malvasier and Früher Roter Malvasier; and in Italy it is referred to as Malvasia bianca del Chianti, Malvasia di Candia, Malvasia Rosso, Malvasia del Lazio, Malvasia Puntinta, and Uva Greca. Spanish synonyms include Malvasia Fina, Rojal, Subirat, Blanquirroja, Blancharroga, Tobia, Cagazal, and Blanca-Roja. It is known as Malvasia Fina in Portugal, Malvasia Candid in Madeira, Malvazija in the former Yugoslavia, and Monemvasia in Greece.

Source
Currently Malvasia bianca is understood to be from the northwest coast of Italy where it is an obscure variety there known as Malvasia bianca piemonte or Moscato greco. Its origin within Italy and beyond is unknown.

Description
Clusters: medium; long conical and shouldered, well-filled to compact; medium peduncles.
Berries: medium; round; yellow to oily brown when ripe; muscat flavor.
Leaves: medium; deeply 5-lobed with lyre-shaped to overlapping petiolar sinus; large, sharp, jagged teeth; lower surface with moderately dense hair.
Shoot tips: cobwebby hairs on tip; green, young leaves with bronze-red highlights, glabrous and shiny.

Growth and Soil Adaptability
Vines have moderately high vigor and are moderately productive to highly productive. They grow best on well-drained soils of moderate texture to somewhat coarse-textured sandy soils. On very coarse sand, nutrient deficiencies can occur and berry set can be negatively affected. In southern San Joaquin Valley berry set can be a problem on all soil types, and may be worse when the vines are vigorous. Sandy soils with low zinc availability may also increase berry set problems. Magnesium deficiency symptoms can easily occur on sandy soils or sites prone to excessively wet spring conditions. Vine spacing should be about 7 to 9 feet or more for vertical-shoot positioning or standard bilateral cordon. For horizontally divided quadrilateral vines, spacing should be 6 to 7 feet down the row.

Rootstocks
Moderate vigor rootstocks are probably best, such as 101-14 Mgt, Kober 5BB, or 1103P. Vigorous rootstocks may increase susceptibility to poor berry set and reduce yields. Freedom and Ramsey have been common in the past, but should be used with caution.

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Clones
There are limited registered clones available. Currently there is only one FPS-registered selection, Malvasia bianca FPS 03. The importation of new clones from Italy is desirable, as FPS 03 is of questionable trueness to variety, according to Italian ampelographers.

Production
Malvasia bianca’s vines are moderately to very productive, capable of bearing large crops—8 to 12 tons per acre. Higher yields may sacrifice some flavor intensity and delay harvest. Yields of Malvasia bianca can be variable and disappointing due to poor set and low bud fruitfulness. The variety can sunburn easily if it is overexposed, and its fruit tends to amber easily with high maturity levels.

Harvest
**Period:** An early to midseason variety, ripening in late August to late September.

**Method:** Large clusters, easily cut peduncle, and productivity make hand harvest easy. The vine is somewhat adapted to trunk shaker type heads, but machine harvest is still difficult, with medium potential for juicing of berries at harvest. Machine harvest by pivotal striker is less desirable, while newer, bow-rod heads may reduce the possibility of juice losses.

Leaves
Medium; deeply 5-lobed with lyre-shaped to overlapping petiolar sinus; large, sharp, jagged teeth; lower surface with moderately dense hair.
Training and Pruning
Malvasia bianca is well suited to spur pruning and bilateral cordon or quadrilateral training. A spur count of 14 to 18 two-node spurs is acceptable, depending on rootstock, soil depth, and soil texture. Cane pruning is not suggested without cluster thinning or severe overcropping may result with reduced shoot vigor and delayed harvest.

Trellising and Canopy Management
A standard bilateral cordon with a cross-arm foliage wire is recommended. Vertical-shoot-positioned systems are also acceptable. High-vigor sites may benefit from a GDC-type trellis but cross-arm foliage wire may again be required to avoid excessive ambering of fruit.

Insect and Disease Problems
Bunch rot can be a problem due to the relatively thin berry skin, but severe rot is not common with moderate irrigation levels and nitrogen application. It is somewhat resistant to powdery mildew. Leafhoppers can be a problem in some cases, especially as an annoyance to hand-pickers at harvest.

Other Cultural Characteristics
At optimum maturity amber, slight browning, and some dark spotting may occur as with many muscat types. Coarse soils and severe land leveling may induce magnesium deficiency symptoms in leaves. Fill areas tend to show symptoms as opposed to cut areas seen with potassium problems. At moderate- to high-crop loads, sugar levels may not exceed 19 to 20° Brix at full maturity, with less intensity of muscat flavors.

Winery Use
Highly flavored wines of good to excellent quality and moderate acidity are produced. These wines are used as a main base or as a blend in sparkling wines, as an enhancement of fruit character in Chardonnay wines, or for dessert-type premium wines. Future interest as a sparkling wine base or premium dessert wine may increase but still may be somewhat limited to niche markets and winery specialty needs.

— Paul S. Verdegaal