



# Malbec

## Synonyms

Malbec's official name is Cot in France, where it has many synonyms, including Auxerrois, Malbeck, Noir de Pressac, Cote rouge, Cahors, Cot de Pays, Jacobain, and Pied Rouge. It is known in southwest France and the Loire Valley as Cot. In the New World, including Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, it is known as Malbec.

## Source

The variety's origin is uncertain. Since the eighteenth century it has been known in southwestern France, where it is still mainly grown in that country. It is a minor variety in Bordeaux and the Loire Valley. It is also grown in Italy, Argentina (where it is the third major variety), Chile, Australia, New Zealand, and California. In 1858, Charles Lefranc brought it from France to the Santa Clara Valley, as did Jean-Baptiste Portal in 1872. California acreage declined sharply in the late 1800s due to phylloxera. It was planted little thereafter until recently. Now there is renewed interest in the variety for blends of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot and for varietal wines.

## Description

**Clusters:** medium; wide conical, loose to slightly compact; short to medium peduncles.

**Berries:** medium; round; purple-black.

**Leaves:** medium; mostly entire to slightly 3-lobed with reduced lateral sinuses; U-shaped petiolar sinus; short, sharp teeth; lower leaf surface is glabrous to covered with sparse, tufted hair.

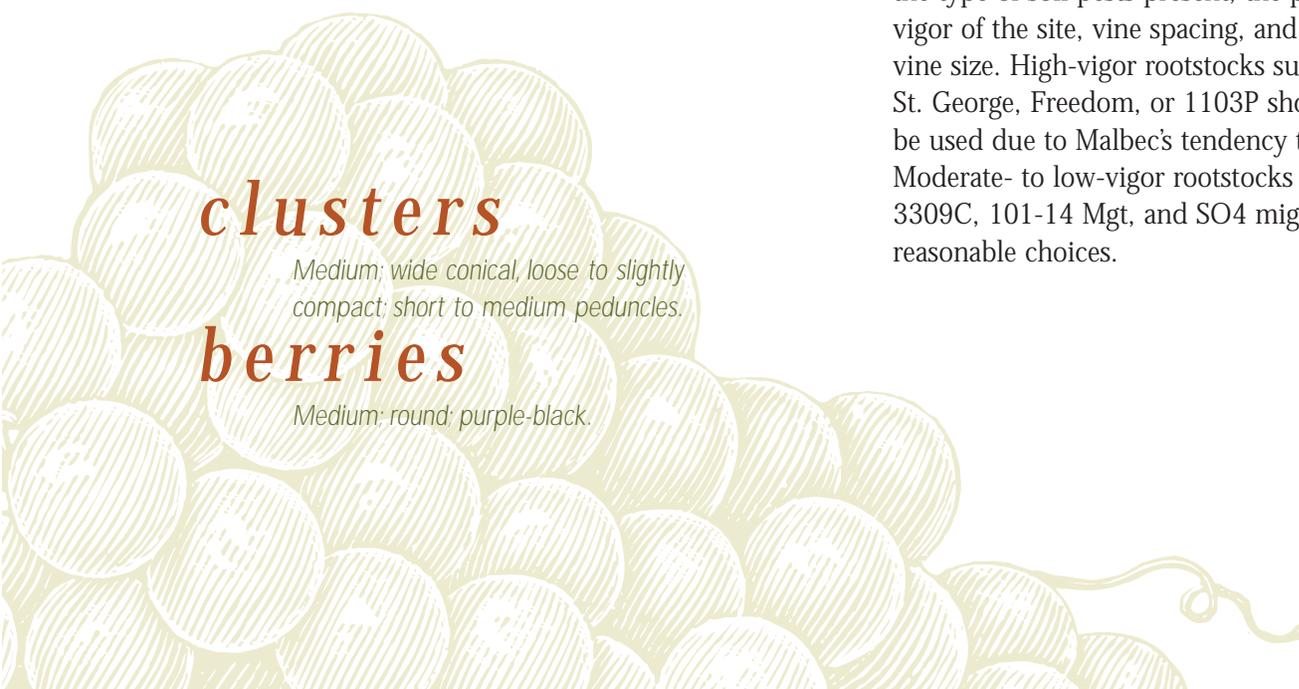
**Shoot tips:** felty tips; young leaves felty white to downy with bronze-red highlights.

## Growth and Soil Adaptability

Malbec is a vigorous variety adaptable to a wide range of soil types. It is sensitive to coulure or shelling, especially with high vigor or cool weather during bloom.

## Rootstocks

Rootstock selection should be based on the type of soil pests present, the potential vigor of the site, vine spacing, and desired vine size. High-vigor rootstocks such as St. George, Freedom, or 1103P should not be used due to Malbec's tendency to coulure. Moderate- to low-vigor rootstocks such as 3309C, 101-14 Mgt, and SO4 might be reasonable choices.



## clusters

*Medium; wide conical, loose to slightly compact; short to medium peduncles.*

## berries

*Medium; round; purple-black.*

## Clones

Clonal selection is important in this variety to minimize the risk of coulure. Malbec FPS selections 04 and 06 are particularly prone to poor fruit set and low yields. Malbec FPS 08 (non-registered) is consistently higher yielding but is still moderate in production. Recently made available, Malbec FPS 09 (French Cot 180) and 10 (French Cot 46) have potential for more consistent crop set.

## Production

Poor fruit set is a problem in Malbec, and some vineyards may yield only 1 to 3 tons per acre. If set is good, production levels are moderate to high.

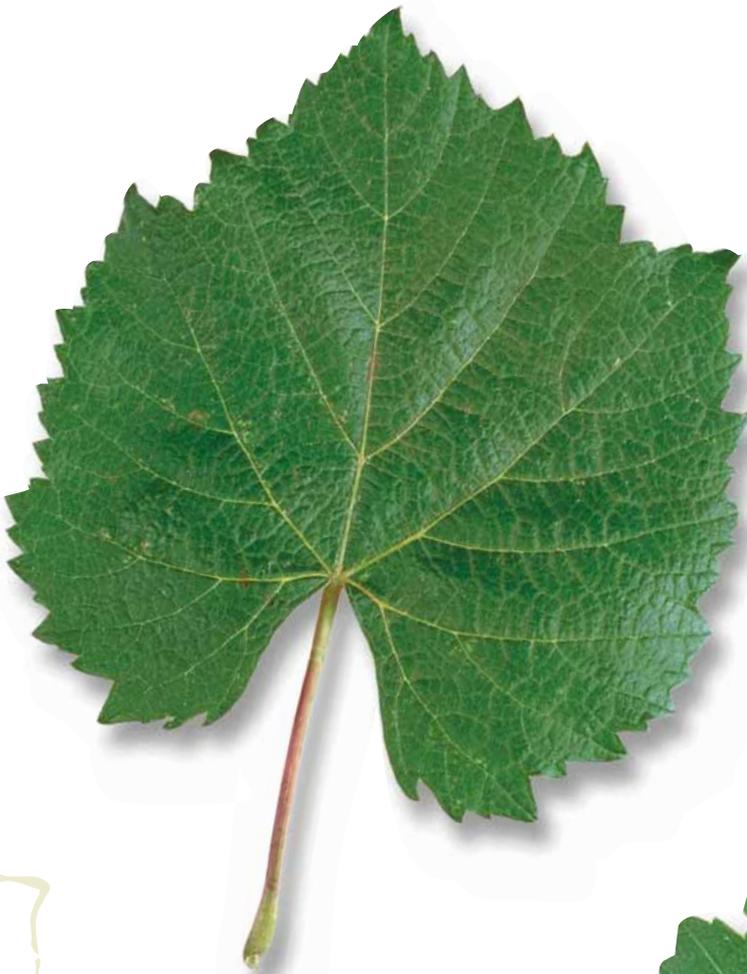
## Harvest

**Period:** A late-midseason variety.

**Method:** Canopy shaking is easy, with juicing medium to heavy.

## Training and Pruning

The variety is usually cordon trained and spur pruned. Low-yielding clones may benefit from cane pruning in order to increase the cluster number. Attention should be paid to adequate vine spacing to balance Malbec's vegetative growth tendency.



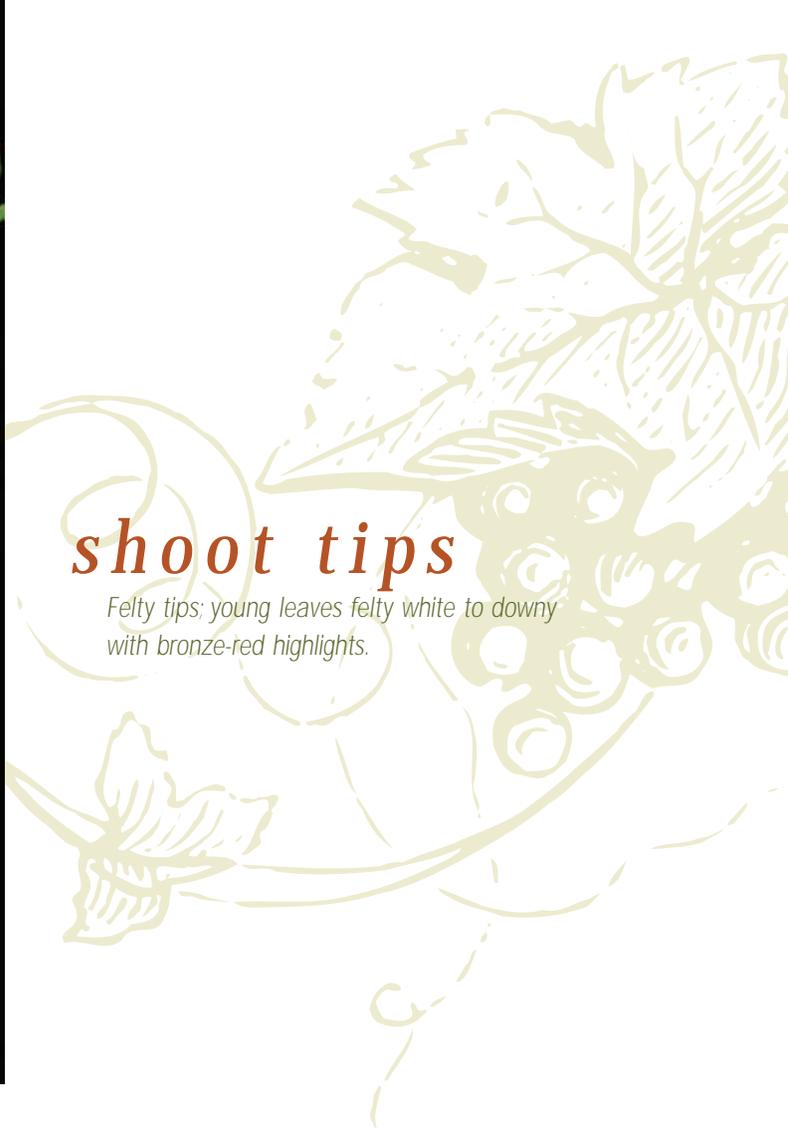
## leaves

*Medium; mostly entire to slightly 3-lobed with reduced lateral sinuses; U-shaped petiolar sinus; short, sharp teeth; lower leaf surface is glabrous to covered with sparse, tufted hair.*



## shoot tips

*Felty tips; young leaves felty white to downy with bronze-red highlights.*



### Trellising and Canopy Management

Malbec's strong, upright growth makes it particularly suited to vertical-shoot-positioned systems, particularly for low- to moderate-vigor sites. Malbec has large leaves and unusually strong lateral shoot growth, leading to a dense canopy in the fruit zone. Leaf and lateral shoot removal are recommended to improve fruit quality and to reduce the risk of Botrytis bunch rot. On higher-vigor sites, split canopy systems can be used to increase the yield potential and balance the vegetative growth.

### Insect and Disease Problems

Malbec is moderately sensitive to powdery mildew. Its high vigor may encourage grape leafhoppers.

### Other Cultural Characteristics

Certain clones are especially prone to coulure. In some years this can lead to particularly low yields.

### Winery Use

Malbec is usually used in small amounts to blend into Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot wines. As a varietal, it makes a softer red wine with limited aging potential but very high quality.

—Edward Weber