



Mourvèdre

Synonyms

In France, the names Mourvède, Mourvedon, Mourves, Morvede, Morvegue, and Mourveze that are used in Provence relate to the color of the grape, as do the names Negron, Negre Trinchera, or Trinchiera in the Drôme. It is also known as estranglé-chien (“dog-strangler”), due to the hard, astringent taste of its fruit; Buona Vise (“good cane”); and Tire Droit, for the vertical direction of its canes, in the Drôme. It is called Espar or Spar in Hérault; Planta de Saint-Guilles in Gard; Catalan in Bouches-du-Rhône; Baltazar in Gironde; Benadu, Negron, and Piemonaïse in Vaucluse; and Flouron or Flouroux in Ardèche, indicating the heavy bloom on its grapes. In Spain, it is called Monastrell, Tinto, Tinta, Tintilla, Alicante, and Mataró. In the United States, it has been widely known as Mataro.

Source

Wine historians suspect that the variety is of ancient origin, perhaps introduced to the Barcelona area of Spain by the Phoenicians in 500 BC. The name Mourvèdre is derived from the town of Murviedro in Valencia, and the name of Mataro is derived from the town of Mataró in Catalonia. After the sixteenth century, the variety was brought to France. The grape is thought to have arrived in California in the 1860s in the Pellier collection, a consignment of stock from France to Santa Clara Valley by Louis and Pierre Pellier. It was popular in the Santa Clara Valley in the 1870s, and by the end of the century it was included in Zinfandel vineyards in the North Coast as part of a field blend. Vineyards were also planted in Contra Costa about that time, and several are still in production. It was also popular in Riverside and San Bernardino until the urbanization of those

areas beginning in the 1950s. Spain is dominant in planted acreage, with lesser plantings in Algeria, France, Australia, and California. There are also small amounts in Tunisia and the former Soviet Union.

Description

Clusters: medium; broad conical, often winged; well-filled to compact; short to medium peduncle.

Berries: medium; round, blue-black with distinct white bloom; juicy pulp with a harsh taste.

Leaves: medium; mostly entire with U-shaped petiolar sinus and very shallow superior lateral sinuses; short, sharp teeth; dense hair on lower surface.

Shoot tips: open, felty tips; young leaves are yellow-green with slight bronze highlights.

Growth and Soil Adaptability

In Spain and France, it is planted in deep, well-drained soils that ensure a regular supply of moisture; without irrigation, it is prone to drought stress. Most of the plantings are within 50 miles of the Mediterranean Sea, which are areas without severe winters. In California, the best wine quality has been achieved on deep, sandy soils of low fertility and minimal irrigation. Mourvèdre requires



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considerable heat to adequately ripen fruit, especially in the period between veraison and harvest. This variety is probably best adapted to a high Winkler Region III or low Winkler Region IV. It is planted principally in Contra Costa County near the confluence of the Sacramento River with San Francisco Bay.

Like many varieties of Spanish origin, Mourvèdre is upright and vigorous in its growth. In California, older plantings are head pruned, and spaced 8 by 8 feet. Newer plantings in the North and Central Coast regions are spaced 6 by 8 feet. In the spring, its shoots can be broken by strong winds. Fruit clusters are medium to large, and there is good basal bud fertility, which makes this variety well suited to spur pruning. In districts with cold winters (such as Lake County), winter injury can be severe. In the foothills this variety can be prone to sunburn.



Rootstocks

In Spain and France, 110R and 41B are used on soils of moderate to high lime content. In California, some vineyards are planted on their own roots, along with AXR #1, St. George, and others. The rootstock incompatibilities reported in French literature have been alleviated with better wood sources, suggesting virus problems in earlier wood sources.

Clones

Originally, 15 clones were selected between 1973 and 1976 from southern France by ENTAV and INRA. Mourvèdre ENTAV-INRA[®] 233 and 369 are presently available commercially in California. As “Mataro,” FPS offers registered selection Mataro 01, which was selected from California vineyards, and FPS 03, which was derived from FPS 01 using heat therapy.

Production

The majority of Mourvèdre vineyards in production in California are old, head-pruned vines that are minimally irrigated. Statewide average production is 3 tons per acre. Newer vineyards planted in higher densities with cordon training and vertical-shoot-positioned trellises appear to be more productive, with yields of 5 to 6 tons per acre in the North Coast.



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shoot tips

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Harvest

Period: Late, harvested in mid- to late October.

Most seasons, Mourvèdre is among the last varieties to be harvested. It has an unusual characteristic of the fruit becoming dimpled like a golf ball as it approaches harvest.

Method: The upright shoots and medium to large clusters make this an easy cultivar to hand harvest. Machine harvesting is not commonly done in the United States. In Europe, it is successfully machine harvested by canopy shakers using bow rods. The berries separate readily from the clusters.

Training and Pruning

Older vineyards are head trained with spur pruning. Shoot thinning is widely practiced to remove nonproductive shoots, increase air flow to discourage bunch rot and powdery mildew, and to improve fruit color. Newer vineyards are cordon trained on vertical-shoot-positioned trellis systems.

Trellising and Canopy Management

This cultivar is well-suited to vertical-shoot-positioned systems, due to its upright growth. Cordon wires are set between 30 and 40 inches. Two sets of movable foliage wires are used to keep shoots upright. In Europe, VSP systems are widely used, but the vines are smaller in stature and more closely spaced.



Insect and Disease Problems

Mourvèdre is sensitive to mites, grape leafhoppers, and esca (in Europe). The thick skin helps to resist Botrytis bunch rot. Tight clusters can contribute to sour rot in warm districts.

Other Cultural Characteristics

This cultivar breaks bud late and ripens late. Consequently, it needs to be planted in warm sites to adequately ripen.

Winery Use

Mourvèdre is used to make both fruity rosés and concentrated, dark-red wines with strong tannic structure. Due to a strong concentration of antioxidants, the wines age well, and they are often used for blending with wines more prone to oxidation, such as Grenache in the southern French appellation of Chateauneuf-du-Pape. These wines benefit from oak aging, especially if the yield per vine is limited.

—Glenn McGourty