



Pinot Gris

Pinot gris is known by several different names throughout its growing regions in Europe. It is called Pinot buret, Gris Cordelier, and Malvoisie in France. In Germany it is known as Ruländer and Grauer Burgunder, and in Switzerland as Malvoisie. The Italians call it Pinot grigio, and the Hungarians Szürkebarat.

Pinot gris, like Pinot noir, was first described in the fourteenth century. It is widely planted throughout Europe; in the United States, Oregon growers were early pioneers in planting and promoting the variety.

Pinot gris is a variant of Pinot noir that produces a grape with variable color described as pinkish, coppery gray, and brownish pink. In the vineyard, it is not uncommon to find clusters that contain one to several berries that are darkly colored and others that are white. Also, individual berries may have skins that display the entire range of colors. A white wine is made from this variety.

Even more so than Pinot noir, Pinot gris requires a cool climate and a long growing season in order to maintain its slightly low acidity. To make a wine style that is typical of cool growing regions, it is harvested at no

more than 23.5° Brix. In the coolest growing regions, harvest sugar level is often determined by the year since extremely cool vintages may result in fruit that is less ripe. This variety is also grown in warmer areas such as the Sierra foothills and the northern San Joaquin Valley, where it ripens easily.

Vineyard design, including rootstock, trellis, and planting density is similar to that of Pinot noir. Vigor is considered moderate to moderately low, although this is affected by site characteristics such as soil depth and temperatures. It may be slightly less vigorous than Pinot noir. For premium wine quality, yields are kept under 5 tons per acre. In cool areas, low tonnage often occurs by default, since cool, damp conditions at bloom will result in poor set.

Pinot gris is more versatile and easier to grow than Pinot noir. In warmer areas, it is acceptable to plant it on deeper soils that are capable of producing up to 6 tons per acre. In these areas, cluster thinning is not as essential. Fruit set is variable depending on the year, yet tight clusters are the norm.

There are three registered selections of Pinot gris. Registered FPS 01 is from the University of California's Jackson Vineyard. Registered FPS 04 and 05 are both from generic French clone 53 that came to FPS from Oregon. Several additional Pinot gris selections are being treated, tested, and identified to qualify them for registered status, including FPS 11 (old selection from Alsace, France); 06 (from Germany); 09 (French 52); 08 (VCR 5 from Italy); and 10 (SMA 505 from Italy). No information is available on the relative performance of these selections.

—Rhonda J. Smith

