



Durif

Synonyms

The variety is known as Dure, Duret, Plant Durif, Pinot de Romans, Pinot de l'Hermitage, Plant Fourchu, Nerin, Gros Noir, and Bas Plant in France and, in California, Petite Sirah.

Source

A French nurseryman by the name of Durif first propagated the variety in the 1880s in the Rhône Valley. Recent DNA research at University of California, Davis, indicates Durif resulted from a cross between the Rhône varieties Syrah and Peloursin. Charles McIver, founder of Linda Vista Winery near Mission San Jose, was the first to import the vine into California in 1884, along with other French varieties. He and others were soon calling it Petite Syrah, and the name stuck. Older California "Petite Sirah" vineyards are often mixed plantings containing mostly Durif, but they also include varieties such as Barbera, Carignane, Peloursin, Syrah, and Zinfandel.

Durif was popular in the Central Valley during the planting boom of the 1970s, mainly to add color and tannin to generic wines. Most of these vines have been removed due to virus presence, disappointing yields, and susceptibility to sunburn and berry shrivel. Durif has regained some popularity as a niche variety in coastal plantings.

Description

Clusters: medium; long conical to cylindrical, compact, often winged to double; short to medium peduncles.

Berries: medium; short oval to round; blue-black with a silvery bloom.

Leaves: small to medium; deeply 3-lobed (shallow inferior lateral sinuses); closed U-shaped petiolar sinus; short, sharp teeth; lower leaf surface glabrous.

Shoot tips: downy, white tips with rose margin; young leaves with cobwebby hair and bronze-red highlights.

Growth and Soil Adaptability

Vines are moderately vigorous and relatively weeping in growth; fasciated shoots are common. Durif leafs out late in the spring and shoots develop slowly. Well-drained soils with moderate vigor potential are preferred for the production of high-quality wines. Because of Durif's potential for sunburn and berry shrivel, soils that readily contribute to stressed vines should be avoided, especially in warm climates.

Rootstocks

Rootstock selection should be based on soil conditions and planting density. When planted on poor soils, a vigorous rootstock such as St. George, Freedom, or 110R would be appropriate. On more fertile sites, moderate-vigor stocks such as 101-14 Mgt or 3309C can be used to limit growth and improve fruit quality.

clusters

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berries

Medium; short oval to round; blue-black with a silvery bloom.

Clones

Little, if any, clonal research has been done on this variety. The only selection currently registered is listed as Petite Sirah FPS 03. An old Napa Valley selection is currently in the virus testing and virus therapy process.

Production

Durif vines are moderately productive with medium, compact clusters. Yields range from 3 to 4 tons per acre in coastal and foothill counties and 5 to 8 tons in the Central Valley.

Harvest

Period: Durif is a mid- to late-season variety. In cooler regions, harvest may not occur until October.

Method: Hand harvest is easy with knives or shears. Moderate growth makes the fruit accessible. Machine harvest with canopy shakers is medium, with juicing medium to heavy. Trunk shaking is medium-hard, with medium juicing. Overripe fruit is difficult to remove.

Training and Pruning

Traditionally, Durif vineyards were head trained and spur pruned in a similar fashion to Zinfandel. Some wine producers have planted new vineyards in this same fashion. Head-trained vines on shallow soils should be limited to 7 to 10 spurs per vine. Ten to 12 spurs per vine are satisfactory with bilateral cordon-trained vines in deeper coastal soils; 12 to 14 spurs per vine may be used in warmer districts.



leaves

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shoot tips

Downy, white tips with rose margin; young leaves with cobwebby hair and bronze-red highlights.

Trellising and Canopy Management

Unless vines are head trained, vertical-shoot-positioned systems are appropriate. The moderate growth usually requires a minimal amount of canopy manipulation. Split canopy systems should be considered only on sites with especially high potential vigor. Leaf removal in the fruit zone is useful to reduce the risk of Botrytis bunch rot; it should be avoided on south and west canopy exposures due to the potential for sunburn.

Insect and Disease Problems

Bunch rot can be a problem due to Durif's compact bunches and late ripening period. Durif is considered fairly tolerant of powdery mildew. Leafroll and corky bark virus diseases were once prevalent in older plantings. Certified planting stock should be used.

Other Cultural Characteristics

The fruit tends to sunburn and raisin if the vines are stressed for moisture during hot spells, or if the fruit is exposed. Upon maturity, the fruit begins to shrivel and raisin, especially in warm climates. Therefore, timely harvest is important to minimize fruit weight loss and to maintain quality. The vines may produce a substantial second crop in some years. Durif has fairly good crop recovery following spring frost damage.

Winery Use

Durif produces a full-bodied, red table wine with deep color and long aging potential. In California, most varietal Durif wines are labeled Petite Sirah. Durif is often used as a blending component to add color and body to lighter red wines.

—Edward Weber