

# Lagrein



## Origin

The first documented mention of Lagrein in Alto Adige was in the year 1318. Thus it is to be viewed as the oldest historically proven grape variety in Alto Adige that is still cultivated today. The name is presumably derived from the term “Lagarina”, which describes the southernmost part of the Adige Valley (Vallagarina in Italian). Remarkably enough, though, the spelling of the variety has not changed any further since the name was Germanized in the early twelfth century. Up to the seventeenth century, white Lagrein also enjoyed special esteem and distribution. As a result of this color differentiation, which is recorded in numerous historical documents, it has to be assumed that the Lagrein with red berries was cultivated at the same time as the white vines. Today, White Lagrein is limited to individual grapevines that have remained. Lagrein as a red wine variety really began to catch on starting in the seventeenth century, at the same time as the classic fermentation with skins and seeds advanced to become the standard of the making of red wine. Previously, the fermentation of only the juice had been practiced in Tyrol since the Middle Ages.

White Lagrein is not genetically related to “red” Lagrein. The red wine variety of Lagrein originated from a hybrid of Teroldego and a still unknown parent variety which, for its part, may be related to Kleinvernatsch (a variety of Schiava). Teroldego, which like Lagrein is only cultivated in a clearly delimited zone, originated in neighboring Trentino. It is similar to wines that are made from Lagrein not only morphologically, but also with regard to the sensory properties.

As a result of the variety's high level of yield, the cultivation of Lagrein was regarded very early on as lucrative. The high yield

quantities were favored by the possibilities for irrigation on the valley floor and around the city of Bolzano. But the chances for survival of grape varieties over the centuries, on the other hand, depended primarily upon their profitability, that is, upon a constantly high level of yield in connection with good robustness, for example against frost. Once aspects of the quality of the wine increasingly came to the foreground, individual varieties disappeared again, including white Lagrein. Its red brother in name, on the other hand, survived. Interest in the variety increased above all starting from the seventeenth century because it was regarded as the ideal blending partner along with Gschlafenen and Schiava for the production of lighter-colored Tyrolean wine.

## Distribution

The distribution of Lagrein is essentially limited to Alto Adige, where 537 hectares (1,327 acres) are presently planted with the variety. Only in neighboring Trentino has the variety been able to gain a foothold after 1920. Even though it is cultivated there on 220 hectares (544 acres) today, the wines do not have the same level of recognition as those from Alto Adige. Within the framework of experimental plantings, Lagrein is also cultivated today in Argentina, the USA, Australia, and Germany (4 hectares/9,9 acres). Through-out the world, there are 850 hectares (2,100 acres) producing.

In 1960, the area under cultivation in Alto Adige was already at 585 hectares (1,446 acres), but after that it fell as low as 253 hectares (625 acres) in 1998, only to rebound to the 537 hec-

tares (1,327 acres) of today. Lagrein thrives especially well in the area surrounding the city of Bolzano. Since as a result of the expansion through the city, the potential for good locations has to a large extent been exhausted, and other locations can hardly achieve the fullness and smoothness of the wine from Bolzano, the area of cultivation may remain stable.

The main cultivation zone is in Bolzano. This is followed by Caldarò, Termeno, Appiano and Ora.

## Vines

Lagrein is one of the late-maturing red wine varieties and has a marked vitality. In particular, the short-stemmed clones with the smaller bunches tend to have strong growth and mature earlier. The yield potential with the large bunch, long-stemmed clones is high. On the other hand, the small bunch clones with a medium yield output are sensitive when blossoming. The risk of blossom drop is correspondingly high. The oblong, conical bunches with the loose berries are for the most part shouldered and have medium-sized, dark blue berries with firm skins.

The preferable locations are found in gravelly valley areas such as the Bolzano basin, where the soils remain warm for a long time in the autumn. This is where the wines develop that tannic quality that is a precondition for soft typologies of wines with an elegant mellifluousness. On the slopes, cultivation is limitedly possible up to 300 meters (1,000 feet) above sea level.

## Wine

Two different types of wine are traditionally on the market. The production of Kretzer, as the rosé wines are called in Alto Adige, absolutely represents the wine tradition of Lagrein. This type is reminiscent of the juice fermentation that was generally widespread before the seventeenth century. The briefly fermented crushed grapes are pressed away after one to two days. Lagrein Kretzer presents itself as a salmon-colored, full-bodied wine with a fresh acidity structure. For a long time, this was the predominant standard wine that was made from the Lagrein grape. The type of Lagrein that is fermented on the seeds and skins only came onto the market after 1960 and at the time was called "Lagrein dunkel" ("dark Lagrein"), a designation which today is no longer permissible under the local wine regulations. The variety increasingly captured international attention starting in 1985 with the use of aging in small oak casks for the best selections.

Lagrein brings forth deeply dark, garnet-red, juicy wines with significant acidity and an intense tannin structure. In the glass, young wines show purple edges. The aromatic quality is defined by cherries, violets, blackberries, bitter chocolate, and fresh dark bread, and wines that have been aged in small oak cases also demonstrate tones of dried fruit. In order to counteract the tendency toward a slightly bitter finish, a variety of cellar techniques have recently been applied. To make a superior Lagrein, vinification in wood is necessary.