

Gewürztraminer



Origin

From the perspective of Alto Adige's winegrowers, the question as to the origin of Gewürztraminer is a delicate topic. Speaking for the name being provided by the winegrowing village of Tramin ("Termeno" in Italian) is the fact that wine from Tramin already had a reputation in the Middle Ages that ranged far beyond the borders of the province. In an analogous manner to other varieties, this grape was consequently also named after the location from which the most sought-after wines were produced. This thesis is also confirmed by a corresponding remark in the municipal laws of Munich from 1346 where, with regard to the wines from Bolzano and Tramin, it was specified, "The wine is named after where it grows." Initially, the "Traminer" from Alto Adige was a white wine which was most likely made from the White Lagrein variety. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was a wine with a reddish color.

A further hypothesis from the research on the name goes back to the *Vitis aminea* that was known to the Romans, which was supposedly of Greek origin. German monks then supposedly contributed to this name being transformed to "der Aminer" and then "dr'Aminer" until finally arriving at Traminer, but there is no evidence of this in the literature. Prestigious researchers presume that the starting point of the variety was actually what is today Southwestern France in Roman times. In a monastery in Stuttgart, the term "Traminer vines" was already mentioned for the first time as early as 1483.

The initial variety must have been the white Traminer, which is still grown today in the Jura region of France under the name "Savagnin Blanc". A color mutation from this yielded the Red Traminer. And a mutation in the aroma then led to the

Gewürztraminer. This name was only mentioned in writing for the first time in 1827 in a document from Rheingau.

Traminer is one of the old original varieties of Europe, from which a multitude of European grape varieties came into existence as a result of hybridization, including Sauvignon Blanc, Sylvaner, Rotgipfler, Green Veltliner, and Chenin Blanc.

For Alto Adige, the first plantings of Red Traminer were carried out by Archduke Johann in Appiano in 1848. Shortly thereafter, selected locations in Bolzano, Merano, Bressanone, and Termeno were also planted with the vines.

Distribution

Today, the variety is planted worldwide on 16,000 hectares (39,537 acres). The country that leads in its cultivation is clearly France, with 3,400 hectares (8,402 acres), with Gewürztraminer being grown exclusively in Alsace, followed by Moldova (2,700 ha/6,672 acres). This is followed by Italy with over 1,400 hectares (3,459 acres), of which 45 percent are found in Alto Adige (631 hectares/1,559 acres), followed by the regions of Trentino (406 hectares/1,003 acres), Friuli (300 hectares/741 acres), and Veneto. Other areas of cultivation are found in the USA (1,200 hectares/2,965 acres), Germany (1,100 hectares/2,718 acres), Ukraine (960 hectares/2,372 acres), Bulgaria and Australia (900 hectares/2,224 acres each), Hungary (800 hectares/1,977 acres), followed by the Czech Republic and Romania. New Zealand, Austria, Slovenia and Canada are holding 300 hectares/741 acres each. There is no differentiation in the statistics between Red Traminer and Gewürztraminer.

In Alto Adige, only Gewürztraminer is planted. It consists predominantly of separate clones from the Technical College for Fruticulture, Viticulture, and Horticulture in Laimburg. But French clones are also cultivated, especially new selections from Alsace.

The most important cultivation zones of the variety in Alto Adige are found in Termeno and Appiano. But winegrowers are also dedicated to Gewürztraminer in Caldaro, Cortaccia and Bolzano. In the Isarco Valley, there are 74 hectares (183 acres) producing. Back in 1965, there were only 50 hectares (124 acres) planted with Gewürztraminer in the entire province. But especially starting from 1990, the area of cultivation increased greatly, and by 1996 the figure had already grown to 169 hectares (418 acres), and then to 380 hectares (939 hectares) in 2005. Today, Gewürztraminer is one of the most widely planted white grape varieties in South Tyrol, covering an area of 613 hectares (1,515 acres). The good price level for these grapes but also for the wines made from them have supported this development which, however, now seems to have gradually reached its limits in terms of revenue possibilities.

Vines

Gewürztraminer is difficult to grow. Physiological disturbances and a difficult blossoming phase, especially with cool weather, lead to considerable fluctuations in yield. The small bunch has small, densely structured berries of a gray to brownish-red color. The skin is firm. It generally reaches its necessary maturity in late September. It flourishes especially well on warm terraced slopes up to 600 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level. This variety is also very well suited for making late-harvest wines. The prominent aromatic quality is already recognized when chewing the grapes. The aromas develop especially intensely with grapes that mature at medium-level terraced slopes (for example, in Ronco and Sella near Termeno) as well as on calcareous, moderately heavy loamy soils.

Wine

In the main production area around Tramin, a type of Gewürztraminer is produced that tends to be lush, with a prominent aromatic quality. These wines often have a high alcohol content, keeping rather low in acidity with a complex structure. The wines from the Isarco Valley are rather lean and delicate, characterized by floral aromas.

The total spectrum of aromas from Alto Adige Gewürztraminer varies between rose petals, cloves, cinnamon, citrus fruits, apricots, lychees, acacia blossoms, and thyme. Gewürztraminers are the only so-called “sweet wines” in Alto Adige, having a residual sugar content of over four grams per liter (and generally 5-10 g/l). A variety of wineries also produce dessert wines from this variety.