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IRSAI OLIVÉR

Hungarian table grape promoted to making soft, aromatic white wines.

BERRY COLOUR: 

PRINCIPAL SYNONYMS: Irsay Oliver, Irsay Oliver Muskotaly, Muscat Oliver (Croatia, Germany, German-speaking Switzerland), Oliver Irsay

ORIGINS AND PARENTAGE

Irsai Olivér is a Pozsonyi Fehér × CSABA GYÖNGYE cross obtained in 1930 by Pál Kocsis in Kecskemét, central Hungary (Galbács *et al.* 2009), in which Pozsonyi Fehér (Pozsony is the Hungarian name for Bratislava and Fehér means ‘white’) is a white wine variety from Hungary that is no longer cultivated but is often confused with KÖVIDINKA because they share the synonym Dinka Fehér. It was officially registered in 1975.

Irsai Olivér was used to breed AGNI and CSERSZEGI FŰSZERES.

VITICULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Vigorous, early budding and ripening, needs hard pruning. Medium-sized bunches of small, firm-skinned berries. Sensitive to low winter temperatures, susceptible to powdery mildew and mites, resistant to botrytis bunch rot. Enjoyed by wasps and birds.

WHERE IT'S GROWN AND WHAT ITS WINE TASTES LIKE

Until the mid 1980s, Irsai Olivér was grown exclusively for the table but by 2008 there were also 997 ha (2,464 acres) planted to make soft, aromatic, grapey wines in many parts of Hungary, although the best results come from cooler areas in the north and west such as Sopron, Neszmély, Etyek-Buda, Mátra and around Lake Balaton (Rohály *et al.* 2003). The wines are best drunk young and are often improved by blending with a more structured variety. Recommended producers include Hilltop (Neszmély), Nyakas (Etyek-Buda), Font (Kunság), Mátyás and Zoltán Szőke (Mátra).


Irsai Olivér is quite widely planted in Slovakia (460 ha/1,137 acres in 2009) and also found in Morava in the south east of the Czech Republic (80 ha/198 acres in 2009), where it is often blended with Ryzlink Vlašský (GRAŠEVINA) and used in the production of sparkling wines.

Muscat Oliver is also found in Switzerland (fewer than 5 ha/12 acres). Producers include Schmidheiny and Lindenmann in the German-speaking canton of Argau and Rosenau in the canton of Luzern.

Irsai Oliver is also found in Krasnodar Krai in Russia (24 ha/59 acres).

ISABELLA

Once widely planted, old American variety now found mostly in Brazil and India.

BERRY COLOUR: 

PRINCIPAL SYNONYMS: Americano (Ticino in Switzerland), Ananas, Bangalore Blue (India), Bellina, Black Cape, Bromostaphylo, Captraube, Constantia, Dorchester, Fragola, Framboisier, Fraula (Corse), Fraulaghju, Frutilla (Uruguay), Gibb's Grape, Gros Framboisé (Switzerland), Isabel (Brazil), Isabella Nera (Italy), Isabelle (France), Isabellinha, Izabella (Hungary), Kepshuna, Kerkyraios, Kokulu Uezuem,

Koreos, Lidia, Loipe Makedonia, Moschostaphylo, New Hanover, Nostrano (Ticino in Switzerland), Odessa (Krym/Crimea), Paign's Isabella, Raisin du Cap (France), Raisin Fraise (France), Raisin Framboise (France), Sainte Helene, Saluda, Schuykill, Strawberry Grape, Tjortjidica, Tzampela, Tzortzidika Chakidike, Tzortzines, Utkopro, Uva Cimice (Italy), Uva Fragola (Italy), Vernet, Woodward, Zampela

ORIGINS AND PARENTAGE

This is one of the oldest native American varieties, but its exact origin has been the subject of much speculation. It is most probably descended from the seedling of a wild native, *Vitis labrusca*, sometimes known as ‘fox grapes’ because of their so-called foxy flavour, found in a garden near Dorchester, South Carolina. According to Munson (1909), it is not a pure *Vitis labrusca* but a cross between *Vitis labrusca* and an unidentified *Vitis vinifera* subsp. *vinifera* variety. It was taken north under an unknown name as early as 1816 and was introduced to New York State by Colonel George Gibbs, an amateur grower from Brooklyn, Long Island. Gibbs then passed it on to William Robert Prince of the Linnaean Botanic Garden in Flushing, Long Island, who named it Isabella (*Vitis isabellae*) in 1822 in honour of the Colonel's wife, Mrs Isabella Gibbs (Prince 1830; Bailey 1906; Pinney 1989; Mabblerley 1999).

Isabella was used to breed LYDIA.

OTHER HYPOTHESES

In the nineteenth century, Isabella was thought to be of Spanish origin: Bernard Laspeyre of Wilmington, North Carolina, claimed to have discovered this variety in the garden of another Frenchman, at Charleston, South Carolina, who had apparently brought it from Spain (Bailey 1906).

VITICULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Moderately hardy, late ripening, and yet able to withstand tropical and semi-tropical conditions. High yields.

WHERE IT'S GROWN AND WHAT ITS WINE TASTES LIKE

Isabella and CATAWBA were the two dominant varieties in North American viticulture for the first half of the nineteenth century but there have been few recent plantings and only a few hectares remain, eg in New York State (22 acres/9 ha in 2009), where it is used for juice and sparkling wine but has largely been replaced by CONCORD.

It was once found in many different regions of the world, particularly in the southern hemisphere and also in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but the two main countries in which Isabella is still widely planted are Brazil, where, as Isabel, it is the most widely planted variety of all (10,691 ha/26,418 acres in 2007), and India. In Brazil, Isabel is used for juice and jelly but also for very large volumes of the sweetish, inexpensive red that is still enormously popular on the domestic market. In India, it is known as Bangalore Blue and the majority of the 4,500 ha (11,120 acres) recorded in 2000 were used for juice rather than wine. Wines are pale, more like a rosé, and have the tell-tale sweet, foxy notes of *labrusca*.

Isabella was at one time also grown in France but new plantings of this and other American hybrids such as JACQUEZ were proscribed in the mid 1930s and existing vineyards compulsorily grubbed up (with compensation) in the 1950s. One objection was that they produced higher levels of methanol in the wines due to greater amounts of skin pectins. It is still quite widely planted in the Republic of Moldova (10,802 ha/26,692 acres in 2009) and in Ukraine (2,126 ha/5,253 acres in 2009).

Ampélographie.



Henry

Imp. F. CHAMBERLAIN, Paris.

Isabelle

ISABELLA

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