

## Wines of Hungary and Austria

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Zwack Slivovitz	(plum brandy)	Hungary		
Evolucio	Furmint	Tokaj, Hungary	2017	\$12.00
Spatzi	Furmint	NE Hungary	2018	\$17.99
Egri Bikaver (Bulls Blood)		Eger, Hungary	2016	\$ 7.99
Affinitas	Kekfrankos	Sopron, Hungary	2015	\$15.99
Markus Altenburger	Blaufrankisch	Burgenland, Austria	2016	\$19.99
Ecker Eckhof	Zweigelt	Wagram, Austria	?	\$14.99
Evolucio Tokaj Late Harvest		Hungary	2012	\$17.99
Oremus Tokaji Late Harvest		Hungary	2015	\$36.99

(highlighting denotes varietals; Tokaji is a blend, in which Furmint predominates (see below))

**Zweigelt** - a crossing of Saint-Laurent with Blaufrankisch, created in 1922 - is the most widely planted red-wine grape in [Austria](#). A highly popular variety, it is grown in every Austrian wine region, with the finest examples coming from [Burgenland](#), particularly the [Neusiedlersee](#). A classic Austrian Zweigelt is richly colored with a deep, bright core of spiced cherry and raspberry flavors. The finest examples have the potential to cellar well for a decade or so, but the majority are best consumed within a few years of release. Although [varietal](#) Zweigelt wines are very common, the grape is also commonly used in blends. It is often combined with Cabernet and Merlot to create an Austrian twist on the classic [Bordeaux Blend](#). Just as commonly it is married with its parent-variety Blaufrankisch for a pure-blooded (if somewhat incestuous) all-star Austrian blend.

Not just limited to dry styles, Zweigelt is used to produce sweet wines in various forms. The world's most expensive wines made from Zweigelt are either *strohwein* made from dried grapes, or [ice wine](#). And these are not just limited to Austrian vineyards; at least one top-end Zweigelt ice wine is produced in Canada's Okanagan Valley.

Zweigelt was developed by Dr Friedrich "Fritz" Zweigelt, who originally named it *Rotburger*. This led to confusion with an entirely distinct variety (see [Rotberger](#)) created at around the same time in Geisenheim, Germany. It wasn't until the 1970s that this duplication was finally resolved, when Dr Zweigelt's variety was renamed "Zweigelt" by the influential Austrian winemaker Lenz Moser.

A truly successful crossing, Zweigelt has inherited desirable characteristics from both of its parent varieties (see [Saint-Laurent](#) and [Blaufrankisch](#)). From Saint-Laurent it gets its bright, Pinot-like cherry aromas and the ability to create silky, elegant wines. From Blaufrankisch it has taken a certain spiciness and good acidity. Both parents are capable of creating wines with deep, rich purple-crimson coloring, so it is no surprise that Zweigelt wines tend to very richly colored; the best have a dark, brooding appearance in the glass. Unfortunately, this latter characteristic creates a natural temptation for some winemakers to overcrop their Zweigelt vines, resulting in wines with acceptable depth of color but rather diluted flavors and aromas. Austria's relatively stringent wine laws have helped keep [yields](#) in check to a certain extent, but there are still marked differences between those Zweigelts from high-yielding vineyards and those made by more quality-conscious producers.

A key indicator of Zweigelt's success as a crossing is that it has now become parent variety itself, most notably with Cabernet Franc to create [Cabernet Moravia](#), but also with Rathay to create Austria's little-known [Roesler](#).

Because Zweigelt buds later than Saint-Laurent and ripens earlier than Blaufrankisch, it provides a kind of insurance policy in the vineyard. While the other two varieties are susceptible to harsh weather conditions (spring frost and autumn rain respectively), Zweigelt vines typically dodge these seasonal threats. Zweigelt also has the advantage of being a high-yielding variety, further contributing to its popularity with winegrowers. Thanks to Zweigelt's popularity in Austria, the variety is now becoming popular in the [Czech Republic](#), [Germany](#), [Hungary](#) and [Slovakia](#). Small-scale plantings have also been trialed further afield, in Canada, Japan and England.

from: <https://www.wine-searcher.com/grape-645-zweigelt>

**Saint-Laurent** is an aromatic black grape variety planted throughout parts of central Europe. It is most commonly found in Austria's key red-wine regions [Niederösterreich](#) and [Burgenland](#). It is also the most widely planted red variety in the [Czech Republic](#) and is gaining popularity in [Germany](#) and other cooler winegrowing nations.

Saint-Laurent wines tend to be dark purple in color, structured yet silky with a characteristic dark-cherry flavor (similar to Pinot Noir). Blackberries, smoke and spice are also commonly exhibited. The wines are often matured in oak and show good aging ability.

Thanks to the success of the variety for producers in Germany's [Pfalz](#) region and parts of [Austria](#) in terms of wine quality and financial return, Saint-Laurent's reputation is on the rise, as are plantings. While it remains a fairly obscure variety, producers in cooler winegrowing regions in the New World are also beginning to experiment – [Canada](#) and [New Zealand](#) are two such countries.

Saint-Laurent has long been thought to be related to [Pinot Noir](#). Some DNA profiling suggests that it is even a direct offspring, but this finding remains unsubstantiated and debate continues on whether there is a relationship. It *is* certain, however, that Saint-Laurent is a parent of [Zweigelt](#) (the other parent is [Blaufränkisch](#)).

from: <https://www.wine-searcher.com/grape-810-saint-laurent>

**Blaufränkisch** (aka Lemberger and **Kékfrankos**) is a black-skinned wine grape grown widely in [Austria](#) and [Hungary](#), and to a lesser extent in neighboring Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Croatia. Tiny quantities are also grown in the United States, most notably in New York's [Finger Lakes](#) but also in various parts of [Washington](#) (the Rattlesnake Hills, Horse Heaven Hills, Yakima Valley), and such far-flung states as California, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Colorado. The common feature in Blaufränkisch wines from all of these places is a fruit-forward profile with aromas of spiced black cherries.

In Austria, Blaufränkisch is the second most popular red-wine variety behind [Zweigelt](#) – a crossing of Blaufränkisch with Austria's other signature red variety, Saint-Laurent. It is grown in almost every Austrian wine region to some extent, but its stronghold is unquestionably [Burgenland](#) where approximately 2,632 hectares (6,504 acres) were cultivated in 2015.

Classic Austrian Blaufränkisch wines are intensely colored, medium-bodied reds with brooding, black-fruit flavors and a hint of peppery spice. Those made around the [Neusiedlersee](#), and in Sudburgenland, can be particularly full-bodied and spicy. Weingut Moric's Blaufränkisch - particularly the "Neckenmarkt" and "Lutzmannsburg" labels – have been attracting a great deal of attention recently, as has Weingut Prieler's "Johanneshöhe" Blaufränkisch.

In Hungary, where it is known as Kékfrankos, the variety occupies roughly 7,998ha (19,764 acres) in total – almost three times its Austrian coverage. The majority of this is located in the vast but little-known [Kunság](#) region, where it is rarely made into anything intended for export. The obvious exception to this is the Donausonne Blaufränkisch,

marketed widely in the United States using the variety's more familiar Austrian name. Its other Hungarian homes include [Sopron](#) in the northwest (on the eastern shore of the Neusiedlersee) and [Eger](#) in the northeast.

Both of these regions have strong histories of wine production, and have the potential (in the right hands) to lead Hungary into a new era as a wine-producing nation, with Kékfrankos as their flagship grape. It has already played a pivotal role in Hungary's most famous red wine, Egri Bikaver, better known as Bull's Blood.

Despite the above, Hungarian Kékfrankos remains far less well known than Austrian Blaufrankisch; in terms of wine production and marketing, Hungary lacks the stimulus and drive of its western neighbor.

It is also widely cultivated in Slovakia and the Czech Republic where it is known as Frankovka. In 2010, approximately 1,378ha (3,405 acres) and 1,160ha (2,866 acres) were cultivated in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, respectively, making them the fourth and fifth biggest Blaufrankisch cultivation areas in the world.

Blaufrankisch was long thought to be genetically identical to Pinot Noir, and even Gamay Noir, which explains its Croatian and Bulgarian nicknames Borgogna and Gamé. Modern DNA profiling has now shown that it is at least related to both of these varieties, as they are all descendants of [Gouais Blanc](#).

In the vineyard, Blaufrankisch buds early, ripens late and delivers generous yields. It needs a warm environment to fully mature, which explains its distribution in wine regions close to the heat of the Pannonian Plain.

from: <https://www.wine-searcher.com/grape-550-blaufrankisch-lemberger>

**Furmint** is the key grape variety associated with Hungary's most famous vinous export: [Tokaji](#). The variety's biting acidity gives wines legendary longevity and, when blended with [Harslevelu](#) and [Muscat Blanc a Petits Grains](#), Furmint can produce some of the most complex and longest-living wines in the world.

Furmint is the dominant grape variety in the Tokaj region, where it occupies almost two-thirds of total vineyard area. Sweet Tokaji wine was extremely popular at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918), and Furmint's vineyard area grew significantly over this time. The variety can still be found in the empire's former lands, most obviously in [Austria](#), [Slovakia](#) and [Slovenia](#).

Although Furmint has clearly been entrenched in Hungarian wine culture for many centuries, the variety's origins are unclear. There are various stories about its arrival in Hungary, involving missionaries, colonists, soldiers and kings, and dates ranging from 1100 to 1760. The stories all seem to agree that the variety came from Italy, although there is little firm evidence to support this.

Outside of Tokaj, Furmint is notably grown in the tiny [Somlo](#) region in northwest Hungary, where it is used to make dry, single-variety wines. This style is increasingly popular, and is marked out by rich, sometime smoke-scented wines. Aromas of lime rind, pears and oranges are often described in such wines. As it ages, Furmint wine takes on copper and amber-like colors and nutty, spicy flavors. Sweeter styles are rich and luscious, with complex apricot, marzipan and black-tea flavors backed by aromas of brown spices and sugar.

Furmint vines bud early and ripen late, which may explain the variety's ability to develop such organoleptic concentration and complexity. It is highly susceptible to [botrytis](#) and has naturally high sugar levels, making it an ideal grape to blend with the more aromatic varieties, Harslevelu and Muscat Blanc a Petits Grains.

Furmint is sometimes mistaken for Koverszolo (Romania's [Grasa de Cotnari](#)), a variety sometimes found alongside it in Tokaj vineyards. The two share similarities both in the vineyard and in the winery; sweet Grasa-based Cotnari wines are Romania's answer to Tokaji, and were once just as highly regarded.

from: <https://www.wine-searcher.com/grape-178-furmint>

**Tokaj** (formerly Tokaj-Hegyalja) has long been Hungary's most famous and respected wine region, thanks mostly to its nectar-like, [botrytized](#) Tokaji dessert wines. The region and its wine are held in such esteem in Hungary that the Hungarian national anthem thanks God that *Tokaj szőlővesszein nektárt csepegtetével* ("into the vineyards of Tokaj you dripped sweet nectar").

The ham-shaped region is located in the northeast of Hungary, near the border with [Slovakia](#). Comprising roughly 30 small towns and villages, it measures 25 miles (40km) from southwest to northeast, making it roughly the same size as Burgundy's Cote d'Or. At its very southern edge is the town of Tokaj from which the region and its wines ultimately take their name. The main centers of Tokaji wine production are the towns of Mad, Tarcsl and Tokaj itself.

Tokaj's climate is relatively warm, protected as it is by the vast crescent-shaped mountain range (the Carpathians) which dominates neighboring Slovakia and Romania. The region's soils are a patchwork of various types. Volcanic clays are to be found in the higher sites on the many hillsides here, and on lower-lying sites layers of [loess](#) and other sedimentary soils cover the bedrock. Closer to the banks of the Bodrog, the river which flows along the region's eastern edge, sandier soils prevail, particularly around Tokaj town.

The grape varieties used to make Tokaji wines are [Furmint](#), [Harslevelu](#) and *Sárga Muskotály* ([Muscat Blanc](#)), in that order of importance. Furmint, which dominates the Tokaji blend, is renowned for its naturally high [acidity](#), high sugar levels and spicy aromatic profile. The first two of these characteristics are responsible for the wine's phenomenal ageing potential, while the latter provides a flavor distinct from any other sweet wine.

The *aszú* (botrytized) wines for which Tokaj is known are made from grapes affected by benevolent *Botrytis cinerea* fungus. This beneficial fungus dehydrates the grape berries, concentrating their sugars and leaving a trademark honeysuckle aroma in the wine.

The sweetness of Tokaji aszu wines is indicated in "puttonyos". A *puttonyo* is a large basket used for harvesting grapes; the number of puttonyos of aszu grapes added to a 136-liter barrel of base wine was a traditional measure of the wines' sweetness. In modern times this has been transposed into a more precise system based on grams per liter of [residual sugar](#). Three puttonyos indicates 25g/l - the lowest sugar content and thus the least sweet of the aszu wine styles. Each additional puttonyo thereafter indicates an increase of 5g/l of residual sugar. Eszencia is the very sweetest aszu style. With around

800 g/l of residual sugar, it is so sweet, and so low in alcohol (about 5 percent ABV) that it hardly qualifies as wine at all. It is the undiluted, barely fermented juice of botrytized berries. Unsurprisingly, Eszencia is one of the rarest and most expensive wines on earth. The non-*aszu* Tokaji wines receive less attention than their sweeter brothers.

These *szamorodni* wines are those made without any additions of pure *aszu* berries (*szamorodni* means literally "as it was grown"), although the grapes may well have been harvested with a certain amount of naturally-occurring botrytis. Even within the *szamorodni* style there are several sweetness levels, from dry *száraz* to sweet *édes*. The typical *szamorodni* wine has a sweetness comparable to an *aszu* of 2 or 3 puttonyos. Most of these wines are matured for a couple of years, and have a gently oxidized, sherry-like character.

Dry Tokaji wines are increasingly popular in the 21st Century, in line with international consumer demand. These can be divided roughly into two categories: fresh, steel-fermented wines best drunk within a few years of harvest, and ageworthy, cask-matured wines. While the former category is often made using a proportion of botrytized grapes, the latter is not; botrytis flavors do not sit well in these relatively serious styles. Typically the wines are labeled with the name of the grape variety from which the wine is made (most often Furmint).

The annual Tokaj grape harvest is a long, drawn-out affair, with multiple stages. The first grapes picked, in September, are those destined for the region's increasingly popular dry wines. The much-prized *aszu* (dried) grapes are not harvested for several weeks after this, and sometimes remain on the vine right into November.

There have long been various legal disputes over the use of the name Tokaj, particularly since 1990, when Hungary imposed strict conditions around the production of its wines. In 2007, Tokaj became a protected name, which only authorized wine-producers from Tokaj-Hegyalja could use. This EU ruling was made despite vociferous protests from Alsace, where Tokaj had long been used as a synonym for [Pinot Gris](#), and from Friuli, where the prefix *Tocai* was traditionally given to the [Friulano](#) variety.

from: <https://www.wine-searcher.com/regions-tokaj>

