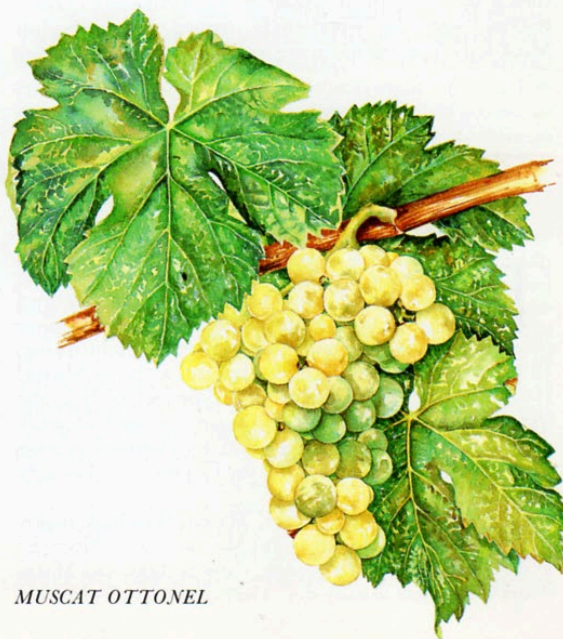


## Muscat Ottonel

This is a real upstart in Muscat terms, bred only in the middle of the last century by the Loire vine breeder Moreau-Robert. Galet reckons that Chasselas was one parent and that probably some sort of inferior Loire Muscat, such as Muscat de Saumur, the other. It was cultivated in Alsace from 1852 and has virtually elbowed the poor-yielding Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, once known as Muscat d'Alsace, out of Rhineland.

The wine produced has a Muscatty aroma, to be sure, but it is usually much lighter than the other Muscats, and often has a rather mousy overtone which is particularly evident in the many eastern European Muscats for which Muscat Ottonel is responsible. Its advantage is that it can be grown in relatively cool latitudes, but it produces much more vapid (delicate when they work) wines than the more widely planted Muscats of Alexandria and à Petits Grains.

Of the three types of Muscat grown reasonably extensively in France, Muscat Ottonel is the least important, covering barely more than 400 hectares (1,000 acres), almost all of them in Alsace. There were fewer than 200 hectares (500 acres) in 1968 and this usurping of Muscat Blanc's role in Alsace has been relatively recent. This may account for the lack of definitive Muscat flavour in many



MUSCAT OTTONEL

so-labelled offerings from Alsace today. In others it can be difficult to distinguish one man's Muscat from his Gewürztraminer. Perhaps some producers even give fillip to the aroma of their weaker Muscats by adding a measure of strongly scented Gewürz.

It is notable that until winemakers in the newer wine regions applied cold fermentation technology to their widely planted Muscat grapes, Alsace was the only area producing dry Muscats. The hallmark of the wines should be a pure, grapey perfume suggestive of roses followed by a firm dry impact on the palate – just like the dry Muscats made in the fashion-conscious Alto Adige nowadays. In Alsace Muscat is classified as one of the four noble grape varieties but is very much an also-ran, constituting less than 4 percent of total plantings. It is technically possible to produce a Vendange Tardive wine from Muscat grapes, but in practice just about every drop of Muscat Ottonel produced in Alsace is drunk as a light, dry aperitif.

There is much more of the vine planted in Austria than in Alsace: well over 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres), 10 times more than of the noble Muskateller. Although some is planted in Wachau, it makes its most individual wines in the Rust/Neusiedlersee region where it can produce very rich dessert wines that may not improve with age but can dazzle in their youth. The vine is said to flourish also in Czechoslovakia and the Moldavian part of the USSR.

The yellow version of the Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains is more common in northern Yugoslavia, but further south, as in Vojvodina just over the border from another Muscat Ottonel stronghold in Hungary, the grape produces slightly flabby sweetish wines. In Hungary Muscat Ottonel or Muskotaly is much appreciated – it is one of the relatively few non-Hungarian grape varieties to be accorded this compliment. Akali on the north shore of Lake Balaton and the wonderfully named Balatonboglári Muskotaly from the south are well known, but most other

prized Hungarian Muscats are produced in the northeast. Abasar, Domszloi and Kompolti are all known Muscats from locations around Eger of Bulls Blood fame.

In Romania's Transylvania vineyards the Muscat Ottonel of Tirnave is among their most treasured wines and certainly a 1969 Edelauslese, in blue-green bottle, was a wonder of rich survival in 1985. The deep apricot gold just hinted at the lovely development of the bouquet in this toasty sweet wine which needed just the slightest bit more acid to make it great. Perhaps Muscat Ottonel's strength lies in late-harvest wines.

*Synonyms:*  
Muskotaly (Hungary);  
Muscadel Ottonel (South Africa).

*Soils:*  
Likes deep, fertile, fairly damp soils best.  
One of the least happy vines on calcareous soil.

*Vigour:* Low to moderate.

*Pruning:* Short canes.

*Susceptibility:*  
Quite susceptible to wet weather and oidium,  
slightly susceptible to downy mildew and rot.

*Rootstocks:* Moderate to vigorous.

*Yields:*  
Moderate to good. 50–100 hl/ha in Alsace.

**Medium quality. Not particularly modish.**



noblest form of Muscat. It is also distinct from Muscat Ottonel, planted all over eastern Europe.

The grapes are used chiefly to produce fairly light white wines, as are those of the red Muscat grown in Alsace. The resulting wines have a certain grapiness but they are often stale and musky rather than glorious and aromatic. The variety is relatively productive and is particularly successful in Karlovo in the southern Valley of Roses. It is also grown at Sungurlare in the east, and in Pleven and Varna on the coast as Varnenski Misket. The variety is very well established in Bulgaria and subvarieties are often called after the region to which they have become acclimatized.

The variety is quite a high yielder and ripens early. It can be found around the Black Sea coast in the Soviet Union.

*Synonym:* Misket de Sliven.

Moderate quality. Muscat flavour but not genealogy.

## USSR

### — RKATSITELI —

Despite its origins in that most impenetrable of wine superpowers, Rkatsiteli is an international variety, grown in New York State, California and China as well as in eastern Europe. Translated from the local dialect, its name means simply "red vine".

Not only does the variety enjoy wide distribution, it is the Soviet Union's most planted wine grape, covering more than 18 percent of the Soviet vineyard or some 248,000 hectares (620,000 acres) and increasing fast. It has by now in fact overtaken Trebbiano in area planted (though it probably still produces less wine) to become the world's second most planted white grape variety.

Rkatsiteli was first recognized in Georgia and accounts for well over half of all wine production there, but it has spread to prominence in all other vine-growing Soviet republics. It is heartening that a grape so important quantitatively should also be of fairly good quality. It can produce wines of real style. Acidity levels are refreshingly high and yet there is character there, too: a pure, spicy yet almost floral aroma as well as good sugar levels. In this respect the sprightly table wines are distinctly reminiscent of Alsace.

Within the Soviet Union it is highly regarded as useful, productive and versatile, providing the raw material for many



*Rkatsiteli*

different wine types in Georgia. Its main use, however, is in what they call "European" table wines. In Kakhetia and Kartalinia it is also used for very sweet dessert wines inventively sold as "Krardanakhi port", "Khirsa madeira" and "Saamo liqueur wine". And while they are about it, they also use Rkatsiteli to produce sherry-like and cognac-like liquids, for the wine reacts well to intentional oxidation and oak maturation.

In the south of the Ukraine Rkatsiteli wines retain their aroma, but can be harsh and too tart. The grapes are best picked when the potential alcohol is almost 20 percent in mid-October. The acidity then is usually still more than 9 grammes per litre but can be tamed by modern vinification methods of extracting maximum fruit flavours. The only respect in which Rkatsiteli lets the Soviet wine industry down is in its imperfections as a base wine for their extraordinarily popular sparkling wines; it has too much alcohol.

Rkatsiteli is also the most planted variety in Bulgaria; its 19,000 hectares (47,500 acres) just beat Cabernet Sauvignon's 18,000 hectares (45,000 acres). It is used there almost exclusively for dryish white table wines.

The variety is cultivated only on a very small scale in the United States, but varietal bottlings have been seen.

Very important and quite high quality.

### — MTSVANE —

In the Soviet Union this is regarded as one of the finest native varieties, producing

From <https://www.wine-searcher.com/grape-722-rkatsiteli>



**Rkatsiteli** is an ancient pale-skinned grape variety from the Republic of [Georgia](#), the oldest wine-producing region on earth. Thought to have been cultivated there for several millennia, the variety remains Georgia's most popular white-wine grape variety even today, and complements the most popular red-wine grape, [Saperavi](#).

Across the Black Sea from Georgia, Rkatsiteli also plays a significant role in various former Soviet-aligned countries. In Ukraine and Bulgaria it holds the number one spot among white-wine varieties, more widely planted than any other, and it also has a respectable presence in Romania and Moldova. Armenia, Georgia's southern neighbor, also has a considerable acreage of Rkatsiteli, although much less than during the Soviet era, when particular value was placed on the variety's high [yields](#). (©Wine-Searcher)

There are three key reasons for Rkatsiteli's popularity in the Caucasus (the geographical region that connects Europe and Asia) and Eastern Europe. First is the variety's strong resistance to cold winter weather conditions. Second is its ability to retain good [acidity](#), even in the hottest summers. Third is its versatility; its balance of sugars and acids make it suitable for use in table wines, sparkling wines, sweet wines, [fortified](#) wines and brandy.

Winters in some parts of the Caucasus are particularly harsh; the very name *Caucasus* is said to mean "shining with snow" in a lost Indo-Iranian language. Varieties less robust than Rkatsiteli simply cannot survive the regular sub-zero temperatures and snowfall. The variety's stronghold region, Kakheti, is particularly affected by this; its inland location, halfway between the Black and Caspian seas, gives it a more [continental](#) climate than the rest of Georgia.

While winter poses challenges to the vine organism itself, hot summers hold their own challenges, more oenological than biological. Long, hot summers such as those experienced in Georgia would cause many grape varieties to lose acidity, making for structureless, "flat" wines. Rkatsiteli, however, has naturally robust acids and sugars in equal measure. Rkatsiteli's only obvious drawback as a variety is its lack of aromatic complexity.

The typical Rkatsiteli wine is best described as restrained and refreshing, with crisp green-apple flavors and hints of quince and white peach. It might be compared to good-quality [Petit Chablis](#), or perhaps Pinot Grigio from northern Italy. Recently, it has been employed with great success in orange wines, where the grapes are left to macerate on their skins for longer, giving more complexity and texture to the wine.

Although found all over Georgia, the variety is used to make wines in greater quantity in [Kakheti](#) than in any other region. Many wine producers in the Georgian Republic are understandably proud of their winemaking heritage, in which Rkatsiteli has played a significant part. One Rkatsiteli wine, from a monastery in Kakheti, is labeled "since 1011", with the vintage in much smaller letters below. The same label explains that the variety's name is formed of two Georgian words: *rka* ("shoot") and *tsiteli* ("red"). This apparently refers to the variety's reddish stalks – a trait Rkatsiteli shares with another tongue-twisting grape, [Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso](#).

Outside Europe, Rkatsiteli is represented in both China (where it is known as *Baiyu*) and the United States. The most significant U.S. plantings are focused in the northeastern states, most notably in [Orange County](#), Virginia and around New York's [Finger Lakes](#), where the climate has much in common with that in Georgia's principal winegrowing regions. Small, experimental plantings of Rkatsiteli exist in California and Colorado.

**Synonyms include:** Rkatziteli, Baiyu, Corolioc

**Food pairings for Rkatsiteli wines include:**

- Georgian *labda* (potato pancake)
- Poached pork ramen
- Grilled fish with fresh herb salad