

Wine Grape Cultivars for Arkansas

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WHITE WINE VARIETIES

Carlos is our best muscadine for white wine and juice.

Cayuga White- Interest in this cultivar is growing. The yields are good and it produces good quality grapes. It is possible to produce high yields, harvest at a reduced Brix, and still get good quality fruit. It has done well in our research plantings, and more will be planted commercially.

Chardonel is another cultivar that is attracting increasing interest. It is hardy and grows well in the Fayetteville, Arkansas, area. It is possible that this cultivar may need the best sites in Missouri in order for it to grow successfully in that region. Chardonel has a nice loose cluster, which makes it easy to control bunch rot, and its disease resistance is much greater than that of Chardonnay. The fruit chemistry is excellent. The pH is good, as is the acid, and it attains good sugar levels and fruit flavors. It has proven to be superior to Chardonnay grown side by side at the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station. However, it is important to have enough degree days; if the growing season is not long enough, the fruit will not ripen. Chardonel makes the best sparkling wine of any grape grown in Arkansas.

Delaware-This cultivar is not a high producer and should be grafted on a rootstock. It sells best when cold pressed and finished as a light, flower wine with 1/2 to 2% residual sugars or as a true dessert wine. It can also be used in premium champagne blends. Magnolia has some disease problems, particularly with fruit rot. The juice, however, is of good quality and the grape has a great name!

Niagara. This cultivar continues to be popular for its unique fruity character. In Arkansas, Niagara is heavy producer but never produce high soluble solids by optimum maturity. It is best when blended with a neutral white wine.

Seyval Blanc needs to be put on a rootstock to increase its vigor, but so far, we haven't found the right one. There is too much fruit for the amount of leaves and, therefore, the fruit must be thinned. This cultivar can be made into a good dry white burgundy (oak aged or sur lies style) as well as a fruity style.

Verdelet is planted on a small acreage around Altus, Arkansas. This cultivar is no harder than the hardiest *vinifera* but has outstanding quality. It is similar to Riesling, and the question arises as to whether to grow this cultivar or a *vinifera* such as Riesling. It does have a delicate flavor that is in demand with some groups of consumers.

Vidal Blanc is a good reliable producer. The farther north it is grown, the more winter injury problems will occur. For example, there are winter injury problems in Missouri with this cultivar.

Vignoles is the hardiest of the winter-hardy French-American hybrids that we recommend and also has high quality. It needs plenty of sunlight exposure, and it is necessary to get good coverage of rot control sprays on the grapes before the clusters close and at veraison to control bunch rot. The cultivar produces great wine in the Arkansas and Missouri regions and makes excellent dessert wines (the best of all hybrids for late harvest wines).

RED WINE VARIETIES

Chambourcin has proved to be the best of all the red hybrids tested. It has good color and very good quality. At this time, it is the only red French hybrid that is recommended for Arkansas.

Cynthiana/Norton is extremely hardy. Extensive research on this grape at the University of Arkansas has outlined the ideal production system for obtaining both high yields and high quality. Vineyard managers that are following these recommendations are learning how to manage the grapes to get high yields (up to 5.5 tons per acre) and good quality. Good canopy management is the key to its success, and, in vigorous sites, it does well on a double curtain trellis system that helps to optimize the fruit exposure. Excellent cellar and barrel aged wines are being made from these grapes.

Noble is our best muscadine for red wine and juice.

Note: Only the winter hardy *vinifera* cultivars can be successfully grown in Arkansas. The best area for growing *vinifera* in Arkansas is around Altus. The farther north of Altus one goes, the more difficult it is to grow *vinifera*. White Riesling has proven to be hardier than Chardonnay, and Cabernet Franc is hardier than Cabernet Sauvignon.