

# FRIULANO

By Peter Dry,  
Emeritus Fellow,  
The Australian Wine Research Institute



## BACKGROUND

In Australia, we know this variety as Friulano (FREE-ooH-LAHN-oh). However, Sauvignonasse is the preferred international name. Sauvignonasse is an old variety from the Gironde—but it has never been important in south-west France where it was usually grown together with Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc (but it is no longer in official records). Today, Friulano is best known in north-east Italy where it has been grown in Friuli since the early 19th century as Tokai (Tocai). It is used in both varietal and blended wines in many different appellations, mainly in Friuli (e.g., Colli Orientali del Friuli), Lombardy and Veneto. Under pressure exerted by both Tokaj producers in Hungary and the EU since the early 1990s, Italy reluctantly agreed to discontinue the Tokai name in 2008 and consequently adopted the name Friulano. Slovenia also changed to Zeleni Sauvignon or Sauvignonasse. Other synonyms include Occhio di Gatto, Sauvignon de la Corrèze (central France), Sauvignon Gros Grain (central France), Sauvignon Vert (central France, Chile), Tai Bianco (Friuli) and Tocai Italico (Lombardy, Veneto). The so-called 'Sauvignon Vert' of California is actually Muscadelle. In 2010, there were 2911ha in Italy and 190ha in Slovenia. It is also grown in Ukraine, Russia and Argentina (515ha). Chile has 785ha—many of the oldest so-called Sauvignon Blanc vineyards in Chile were discovered to be Sauvignonasse in the late 20th century. Although they have now changed the name it is possible that Sauvignonasse is still a component of Chilean 'Sauvignon Blanc' wine. In Australia, Friulano has been found in old vineyards in Great Western, Mudgee and Goulburn Valley. There are at least four wine producers in Australia, mainly in cool regions.

## VITICULTURE

Budburst is late and maturity is midseason. Vigour is high with an erect growth habit. Bunches are medium and well-filled to compact with small to medium berries that are gold with orange tints when ripe. The skin is thin but not as much as either Semillon or Sauvignon Blanc. Yield is moderate to high. Cane pruning is mainly used in Italy due to the low fruitfulness of basal nodes but long spur pruning has also been used in Australia. Friulano has average susceptibility to downy and powdery mildews but is sensitive to botrytis bunch rot. This variety is relatively homogeneous with some clonal variation in wine flavour profile and structure.

## WINE

Wines are delicate, medium to full bodied, and have low acidity unless corrected. Descriptors include bitter almonds, dried grass, pear, apple, fennel and mint. There is some similarity with Sauvignon Blanc but Friulano wines are less crisp and aromatic with more body. Friulano is a good blending partner: for example, some Friuli producers use 40% in combination with Chardonnay (40%) and Sauvignon Blanc or Ribolla Gialla (20%). Some Australian producers have successfully blended it with Pinot Gris.

*For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling ([marcel.essling@awri.com.au](mailto:marcel.essling@awri.com.au) or 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.*