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History Of Seedless Grapes And Raisins Used In Wine Making

By Pat Malcolm

In centuries past, ancient man noticed that grapes hanging on vines lasted for months, and even

though seedy, the fruit was sweet to the taste. These grapes dried out in the sun and were called raisins. The raisins could be stored for months to be eaten at a later time, centuries before advanced civilizations learned how to preserve foods artificially by canning and freezing. Other fruit items such as palm tree dates, figs, apricot, prune-plum, pear, and peach could be preserved by sun drying. Today, many additional products can be preserved by vacuum drying, such as strawberry, blueberry, and a host of tropical fruits, such as pineapple, guava, and many other fruits and berries. After many people age, a craving for dried fruit, grapes, and berries intensifies because of the high sugar content (sweetness), and the concentrated flavor.

Basically, all ancient raisins were grown as two types: the regular sized grapes were dried, large in size with large seed, and the raisins that came from Corinth, Greece were called currants (the word is a corruption of the word Corinth). The currants were very small but grew into huge grape clusters on the grapevine, and were extremely sweet with an aromatic, intense flavor. Currants became an international, valuable success, and were sought after, even being grown to be used in trading matters like currency. The word, currency, derived from the word currants.

The mystery remains today about which chemicals in grapes, other than sugar, that are responsible for preserving grapes in the form of raisins or in bottling the liquid aromatic wine, that improves in flavor after being aged for many years. There is a special grape from Hungary called Tokay (Tokaji) that is left on the vine to ripen into raisins. The raisins are pickled and fermented into the famous Tokay wine, that must be aged for many years as an aromatic wine known for its unique and intense flavor. The Tokay wine was named as the wine of Tsars, Kings, and Presidents . Catherine the Great, Tsarina of Russia, stationed Cossack soldiers to guard her treasured cache of Tokay raisin wine. Queen Victoria of England received 972 bottles of Tokay wine on her birthday. King Louis XIV of France pronounced Tokay wine as "the wine of Kings, the King of wines." Gourmets agree that Tokay wine should be assigned to a special named category, since the extra step of aging came from the aging of the grape to the raisin, and is bypassed in normal wine producing.

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It is difficult to trace the absolute first appearance of raisin culture in ancient history, but it is known that raisins were written about in the ancient Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible. Raisins were actually written about in the Bible as a forbidden fruit, that was prohibited from the diets of a religious cult called the Nazirites. Members of the cult were Nazirites, such as Aaron, brother of Moses, and all his priestly descendants; Samson, the Judge; John the Baptist of the New Testament, and members of another religious cult, the Rechabites. Numbers 6:14 reads that the Nazirites were forbidden to taste fresh wine, "grape juice or raisins." These Nazirites were not allowed to eat anything from the grapevine, even forbidding the eating of grape skins and grape seeds, and were not even permitted to grow grape vines or to own vineyards. Judges 13:13 prohibited the mother of Samson from allowing her son to eat "raisins or drink any wine."

Even though the Scriptures make no direct prohibition to John the Baptist to abstain from eating raisins, the edict is implicit in acknowledging that John the Baptist was a Nazirite, which was referred to by Jesus in Matthew 11:18 and Luke 5:33.

King David was given "one hundred raisin cakes and 200 fig cakes." 1 Samuel 25:18, after having nothing to eat or drink for three days and nights. David was given "part of a fig cake, two clusters of raisins, and some water" 1 Samuel 30:12. After leaving Jerusalem, King David's donkeys were loaded with one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred bunches of grapes, and a small barrel of wine. At the feast for King David, donkeys brought vast supplies of "fig cakes, raisins, wine" etc for the celebration. 1 Chronicles 12:40

Historically, it is recorded that the Greeks were growing grapes (currants) in Corinth, and the culture of grapes and raisins flourished with the rise of the Roman Empire followed by the Medieval Age of the Catholic church and the Crusades that renewed and redistributed the trade of grapes and raisins. Raisins were used as a reserve food on the ships of Christopher Columbus, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, in 1492. Spanish Missions later grew grapes and produced raisins in the New World, most importantly in California, and were the most important commercial farmers to plant and grow grapevines for raisin production.

Perhaps the most important improvement in raisin marketing came from the vineyard of William Thompson, who renamed the grape he imported as the white "Thompson Seedless" grape, that was, and is, the most significant cultivar in modern grape marketing, and customer demand for a seedless raisin. Many other new seedless grapes have been recently hybridized as candidates for seedless raisin to plant and grow. The pleasure of eating sweet, aromatic raisins is reduced, if the person is required to spit out hard, bitter tasting seed, therefore, seedless raisins dominate the market and the fresh grape fruit market. Recent advances in applications of plant growth hormones assure the total seedless condition of grapes and raisins, because the seed inside the embryonic grape are completely aborted by spraying the flowers of the grapes with gibberillic acid (gibberillin) and the grapes grow into very sweet, big and juicy, and evolve into excellent raisins.

New grape varieties that are useful for raisins are:

Black Beauty seedless grape, the only black seedless grape with a taste like concord grapes.

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Flame seedless grape, the second most popular seedless grape, compared to Thompson's seedless, deep red in color, round with a pleasant crunch and a sweet–tart taste balance.

Tokay seedless grape, also called Tokay flame seedless, sweeter version of Flame seedless, orange–red with a crisp texture.

Perlette seedless grape, the frosty–white bloom is atop a crisp green skin, the hardiest seedless grape that ripens earlier than other varieties.

Ruby Seedless grape, deep red skin, juicy and oval shaped.

Thompson's seedless grape, white, crisp, juicy and sweet.

Other seedless grapes are Autumn Royal seedless grape, Canadice Seedless grape, Concord seedless grape, Crimson seedless grape, Princess seedless grape, and Summer Royal seedless grape

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<http://www.tytyga.com>

Wines Of Montefalco – Sagrantino Passito – Italy

By Paolo Mic

The most popular wine created in Montefalco is Sagrantino. Wines from the region of Sangiovese date back to pre–Roman times however, it was Franciscan friars that actually introduced Sagrantino wine grapes to the region from Minor Asia. Today, Sagrantino can boast about the certificates of quality DOC and DOCG, which it received in 1979 and 1992.

The uniqueness of Sagrantino is that one special variety is created by using partially dried grapes; however, other cultivated grapes are used as well.

Sagrantino of Montefalco's dry version is a garnet red color with just a soft whiff of violet petals with an aroma of blackberries. The alcohol strength is between 13% and 15% and should be served at room temperature to delight your tastebuds.

The variety of Sagrantino created with partially dried grapes is a full–bodied wine, which is smooth, spicy, and warm. The alcohol strength is always 14% or more. The color of this variety of wine is also a garnet red.

Sagrantino Passito wine is another favorite of the Montefalco region and is the most traditional and ancient wine of the area. This dessert wine is created by using Sagrantino grapes with traditions that have been passed down through the ages. The grapes are fully ripe when they are chosen for Passito

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wine. They are placed on racks in rooms that are very well ventilated so the grapes can dry out evenly and slowly. They will go through the drying process for two months before they are pressed and made into delightful dessert wine.

Montefalco wines were at one time created by monks and their wonderful way of creating such exquisite wines still exist today with the help of Sagrantino grapes that are harvested at the perfect time, aged for the exact amount of time, and then pressed and turned into wine.

Other wines produced here are Montefalco Rosso DOC and Montefalco Riserva DOC. They are produced mixing up Sagrantino and Sangiovese grapes. These are very good red wines.

Wines produced in Montefalco are exported all over the world, making this city very famous and known.

Information about the Wines of Montefalco

<http://www.tuttomontefalco.it/eng/montefalco-wine/wines-montefalco.php>

and Montefalco href=

<http://www.tuttomontefalco.it/eng/index.php>

<http://www.bed-and-breakfast-in-umbria.it/eng/montefalco/montefalco.aspx>

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