

TRAMINETTE

This hardy hybrid grape can weather everything from extreme cold to hot, humid summers.

There must be something special about a grape if a state declares it as its own. Meet Traminette, Indiana's signature wine grape. This white hybrid is a cross between Gewürztraminer and Joannes Seyve 23.416 (itself already a hybrid—making Traminette a true mashup), bred in 1965 by Herb C. Barrett, whose original intent was to create a table grape that incorporated the classic floral perfume and white pepper spice innate to Gewürztraminer.

"It's a grape we can grow from north to south," says Jill Blume, enology specialist at Purdue University, explaining that the state, which sees all four seasons—from extremely cold winters through to hot, even humid summers—is much cooler in the north than it is in the south. Thus, finding a grape that is both winter-hardy and disease resistant is key for growers throughout Indiana to produce healthy grapes and high-quality wines.

"In the north, the growing season can be as little as 150 to 160 days...and winter temperatures can reach minus 15–20°F," explains Jeff Hill, proprietor of Rettig Hill Winery in Milan, Indiana. "The northern part of the state can fully ripen Traminette, but their harvest dates occur about 10 to 14 days after southern Indiana and the total Brix and pH are lower." Conversely, in the southern part of the state, the growing season can exceed 200 days, and winter low temperatures are much more moderate, resulting in an overall riper fruit profile.



TYPE:
aromatic white hybrid grape

CROSSING OF:
Gewürztraminer and Joannes Seyve 23.416

GROWN IN:
U.S. East Coast and Midwest

WINE STYLES:
still, sparkling, dry, all levels of sweetness

AROMAS/FLAVORS:
rose petal, white pepper, lychee, apricot, honey, with a balanced elevated acidity

FOOD PAIRING:
spicy fare (like Thai green curry), foods rich in umami (think mushroom risotto) and dry cheeses (Gruyere, Comté, Manchego)

The range of climatic conditions down the length of the state means there's a wide variety of Traminette wine styles produced—from sparkling to still, fully dry to off-dry, and even ice wine and botrytized sweet wines. The intense aromas and flavors of Traminette, most akin to its Gewürztraminer parent, come from the terpenes found in the grape's thicker skins. "In cellar, we don't press too hard or keep the juice in contact with the skins too long—it'd be too floral, too 'grandma's perfume,'" says Christian Huber, seventh generation grower-producer of Huber's Orchard, Winery and Vineyards.

Buck Creek Winery's Joseph Durm leans in on those aromatic compounds as he experiments with a 30-gallon "pilot lot" of completely skin-fermented Traminette. "We always ferment our Traminette completely dry and then back sweeten slightly to get the sweeter aromas to pop and the acidity to lose its sharp edge," says Durm. "But I'm thinking this new skin-fermented variation might not require any back sweetening."

Traminette is probably one of the most consumer-friendly of hybrids—there's something for every palate. "Just be open minded," Hill says. "There's a whole slew of styles to choose from."

—Stacy Briscoe