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Native Grapes Prosper in Puglia

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TENUTE RUBINO



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Known for its white-sand beaches and seemingly endless sunny days, **Puglia** is the vacationland of **Italy**. Tourists from around the world flock in droves during peak summer season, basking in the region's warmth, sipping on local fresh **rosatos** and enjoying the simple, yet refined, farm- and sea-to-table fare only Puglia can provide.

The heel of Italy's boot is also the country's agricultural hub, producing the bulk of the wheat, olives, vegetables and fruit that supply the rest of the continent. So it should be no surprise that wine grape production is also within its forte. Second only to **Veneto**, Puglia is a viticultural powerhouse that produced about a fifth of Italy's wine in 2020.

Quantity and quality often don't go hand in hand in the wine world, yet a growing number of small producers are reviving the region and pushing beyond its bulk-wine past to shed new light on a number of native grapes that have thrived in the region for centuries.

Producing some of the best red, rosato and even **sparkling wines** from Puglia, here are the main grapes to know.

Susumaniello

Historically treated as a simplistic, high-yielding blending grape that eventually fell out of favor, the resurgence of Susumaniello in Puglia is a great example of the region's recommitment over the past few decades to native grapes. The vine is highly vigorous when young and unless meticulously pruned it will yield a large amount of fruit—which was ideal in the region's bulk-wine past. Beyond the 10-year mark, the vine becomes far less productive, which likely contributed to many of the vines being torn up and replaced.



Small pockets of the grape are planted along parts of the Salento peninsula that border the Adriatic Sea, mostly in the provinces of Bari and Brindisi. There is no consistent style to Susumaniello. The red wines can be easy and fruity or bold and brutish, some laced with hearty oak. What remains throughout, however, are the **supple** tannins and rich, plummy fruit that will entice many consumers. **Metodo Classico sparkling wines** made from the variety can also be found; however, the rounded, fruity rosatos prove most promising.

Masseria Li Veli 2021 Askos Susumaniello Rosato (Salento); \$21

Tenute Rubino 2018 Oltremé Susumaniello (Brindisi); \$19, 89 Points. There's a brambly, spicy edge to the enticing raspberry and blackberry aromas in this wine. The palate is plush and rounded, filled out by juicy berry flavors that are framed by gentle tannins and lifted acidity. This is a young, fresh, easygoing wine that will please many with its accessible style. — A.P.

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