

# Pinot Gris...Oregon's white grape

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Over the past few years, Oregon has received quite a bit of press and recognition for their number one wine, Pinot Noir. However, with all of the focus and attention on Oregon's favorite red grape, many have overlooked their top white grape, Pinot Gris. And, what a shame that is because Oregon Pinot Gris is an absolute gem.

Pinot Gris, also known as Pinot Grigio in Italy and Tokay d'Alsace in Alsace, France, is actually a clone of Pinot Noir. Pinot Gris has been planted in Europe for centuries, and it is believed that it originated in

Burgundy, France. While "gris" means gray in French, the color of the grapes' skin varies depending upon climate and where it is grown.

David Lett of The Eyrie Vineyards is the person responsible for bringing Pinot Gris to Oregon in 1966. Lett, who observed Pinot Gris production in Alsace, planted 160 cuttings in Oregon and in 1970 produced the first Oregon Pinot Gris. Oregon's ideal growing conditions and the fact that Pinot Gris easily flourishes lead to an increased interest by other local winemakers.

However, the grape was not an instant hit as Chardonnay was steadily gaining momentum. In the mid-1980's grass roots marketing efforts led by several Oregon winemakers helped to establish Pinot Gris as a viable white alternative. Today, Pinot Gris is the most widely planted white wine grape in Oregon, followed by Chardonnay.

While wines do vary stylistically from region to region, Oregon Pinot Gris generally expresses the grape's moderately full body and plump, lively flavors. Typical aromas and flavors include pear, apple, citrus, tropical fruit and some even have a honey-like quality. You'll also find a refreshing, balancing acidity, which comes from Oregon's cool climate.

I find Pinot Gris offers the best of both white wine worlds; it's rich, round and lush like a Chardonnay, but dry, crisp and refreshing like a Sauvignon Blanc. Incredibly versatile and food-friendly, they pair well with a broad range of foods from vegetarian and shellfish to sausages and meats such as pork and chicken, and even go with highly spiced Thai or curry dishes.

Because Pinot Gris has not become extremely trendy, it remains quite affordable with most selling for under \$20.

## Butch's Oregon Pinot Gris Picks:

**King Estate**  
2005 \$12.99

**Sokol Blosser**  
2003 \$15.99

**Rex Hill**  
2004 \$16.99

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