Pink and Light Red Heirloom Grape Varieties for the Northeast

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This article recommends pink and light red heirloom grape varieties that I have grown and evaluated for the past fifteen years. My farm, Cedar Cliff, is located in Athens, NY, which is on the west bank of the Hudson River about fifty miles north of Newburgh, NY. These quality 19th century heirloom varieties were mostly bred in eastern Massachusetts and in the Hudson Valley between 1840 and 1880. They are suitable for most of New England and the Middle Atlantic States except for its coldest regions. Many of these varieties can be used for both wine production and as table grapes. They are all productive, winter hardy, and fungus disease resistant. Because of their resilience, they need less labor, spray material, and other cultivation practices than most of today's commercial varieties. Consequently, they can be grown profitably in the Northeast. Further, since they are locally developed heirloom grape varieties, they should command heightened interest and demand from wineries and the wine consuming public.

Agawam (Rogers No. 15) *(labrusca, vinifera)*, a Carter x Black Hamburg hybrid, was bred in 1851 by Edward S. Rogers (1826-1899) of Salem, MA. Agawam is dark & dull purplish-red with a lilac bloom. Agawam is a vigorous variety that is hardy with thick canes. It is winter hardy, like Delaware; productive to very productive, but needs a careful spray program to combat fungus diseases.

Agawam prefers a somewhat heavy soil, doing better on clay than on sand or gravel. Agawam is harvested mid-season to late-mid season, soon after Concord. Of the Rogers hybrids, it is the only completely self-fertile variety, but its production is enhanced when placed in a mixed variety vineyard.

The berry is large to very large like Concord. The attractive cluster is medium-large to large and somewhat loose to moderately compact. The cluster is short, rather broad, tapering to somewhat cylindrical with one shoulder. The grape has a thick tough skin, but it is not a slip skin variety. The sugar levels are at 19˚ to 20˚ Brix, with acid levels like Concord. It is a dual-purpose grape that is good for the table and for wine production. It makes a quality white wine that is aromatic and fruity with a Muscat flavor and herbal finish, that blends well with other white wines. As a table grape, it is rich, sweet, with a soft aromatic Muscat quality.

Delaware *(aestivalis, labrusca, bourquiniana, labrusca, vinifera)* is a premium dark pink grape that was first identified in Ohio in 1849. It produces a white wine that is great either alone or in blends. It is one of my most favorite grapes for the table or the cellar.

Delaware is well balanced to make a quality dry or semi-dry white wine. The self-fertile grape can be somewhat finicky in the field, but is generally tolerant of most soils. It prefers a rich, but not too rich, loam or slightly clay loam soil. It is winter hardy. The medium-sized vine has moderate to average vigor and productivity. The one-shouldered clusters are very pretty, compact and small-medium in size. It is more resistant to fungus diseases than most French-American hybrids. Delaware ripens early mid-season to mid-season, with sugars which easily can reach 22˚to 27˚Brix. It can hang on the vine for a long time, even if attacked by *Botrytis cinerea*, to produce exceptional dessert wines.

Delaware is versatile in the cellar. It can make delicate and interesting fruity/floral dry table or sparkling wines, with multiple layers of flowery fruit and light spice that is both agreeably foxy and of Muscat. The pale green to slight yellow colored wines have flavors of white peaches, guava, honey, ripe bananas, and almonds with a musky element in both the nose and body. Semi-sweet or late harvest Delawares possess ripe guava, honey, apricots, orange rinds, ripe bananas, muscat, and almond flavors.

Diana *(labrusca, vinifera)* was planted by Diana Crehore (1795?-1870?) of Milton, MA about 1834 from open pollinated Catawba seeds. Diana did not do well in cool New England; however, it thrived in the warmer climate and soils of the Mid-Hudson River Valley. Diana has a full and pretty cluster, exotic flavors, and sugars between 19˚ and 20˚ Brix. The flavor is similar

Delaware *(aestivalis, labrusca, bourquiniana, labrusca, vinifera)* is a premium dark pink grape that was first identified in Ohio in 1849. Photo credit: Linda Pierro, Flintmine Press.

to Catawba, but with more guava flavors that are rich, spicy, and tangy.

The vine is capricious where it grows; and does best on relatively poor, dry, gravelly soil that does not have much compost or nitrogen. Diana does well in the soils that it likes, being vigorous and productive. The flowers are self-fertile and open by mid-season. The cluster is moderately compact with a delicate pale red/amber to rose color. It ripens about one week to ten days after Concord. The vine can be somewhat cold tender, is somewhat resistant to fungus diseases, with medium-sized berries. The skin adheres to the flesh. The cluster is medium large and stubby, being tapering to cylindrical.

Goethe (Rogers No. 1) *(labrusca, vinifera)* is a Rogers' hybrid of Carter x Black Hamburg. This is a high quality grape that shows more Muscat and less *labrusca* flavors that meld well together. Goethe is red-brown to pale red covered with a slight bloom. Descriptions of its vigorousness range from being a medium difficult grower to being vigorous to very vigorous. This varied description may be because Goethe is sensitive to the soils that it grows in. Goethe likes sandy and gravelly soils. In rich clay soils, it grows too much foliage to yield a quality crop.

The variety is hardy to very winter hardy. It is productive and fairly immune to fungus diseases to somewhat susceptible; but, is sensitive to powdery

mildew. It blooms mid-season and is one of the few Rogers hybrids that is partially self-fertile. Some of the more effective self- fertile varieties that can be used to pollinate it are Concord, Delaware, Diamond, Iona, and Winchell.

The berry size is above medium to very large. The skin is thin and adheres moderately to the pulp. The cluster is attractive, of medium length, but broad and tapering, with a single shoulder that is somewhat compact. Goethe is one of the best quality Rogers grapes for the table and for wine production. Its flesh is tender with a pleasant aromatic soft *labrusca* taste. For wine, it is successfully grown in the southern Brazilian State of Santa Catarina. Goethe has sugar levels at around 18˚ to 19˚ Brix, and low acids like Delaware. The harvest date for Goethe is late to very late. This is a grape that cries out to be planted in New Jersey, the warmer parts of Pennsylvania, and the lower Hudson Valley.

Jefferson *(labrusca, vinifera)* was bred by James H. Ricketts (1818-1915) of Newburgh, NY and introduced in 1880. It is a Concord x Iona hybrid and is excellent as a table grape or for wine production. Jefferson can resemble the vigor, productivity, health and disease resistance of Concord, but is not Concord's equal. In color and quality, the fruit resembles Iona, but the cluster is much prettier than Iona.

It produces fruit early-late season, approximately seven to ten days after Concord. Jefferson is not particular about its soils, but does not like lime soils. Jefferson is a high quality red/bronze grape. It is a superior table grape because of its attractive appearance, very large to large clusters, thin adhering skin, soft non-cloying taste, and ships and keeps well. The clusters are cylindrical to tapering, well formed, and well filled to compact. The berries are medium-large and uniform in color. The flavor and texture of the grape is juicy with rich vinous flavors and delicate strawberry-like aroma. The light pale golden colored wines are of excellent quality; with fruits of apricots, soft *labruscas*, honey, pears, melons, and light almonds.

Jefferson *(labrusca, vinifera)* was bred by James H. Ricketts (1818-1915) of Newburgh, NY and introduced in 1880. Photo credit: Linda Pierro, Flintmine Press.

Massasoit (Rogers No. 3) *(labrusca, vinifera)* is a Rogers hybrid of Carter x Black Hamburg. The color is dark-brownish red to red with lilac bloom. Massasoit is a strong, hardy, and a vigorous to very vigorous grower that is productive. It is winter hardy, but fairly susceptible to fungus diseases. It is self-sterile that blooms mid-season to late season. It will occasionally set out very partially filled clusters of small to very small seedless grapes, referred to a Williams Seedless.

The berry is large to medium-large. Its thin skin adheres mostly to the pulp. The cluster size is medium and short, rather broad, that is cylindrical to tapering with a single shoulder. The harvest date is early for a Rogers hybrid, along with the early ripening varieties such as Delaware. The sugars of Massasoit average 19.5˚ Brix, with acids like Concord.

Salem (Rogers No. 22 and 53) *(labrusca, vinifera)* is a hybrid of Carter x Black Hamburg. The color is an attractive dark red/chestnut, with a medium blue bloom. Salem is a vigorous variety that is moderately productive that can be variable in its production. The variety can be susceptible to fungus diseases without a good spray program. On the plus side, it has an open canopy which increases air flow and sunshine to facilitate fungicide sprays. It is very winter hardy, one of Rogers most winter hardy varieties and as hardy as Delaware or more so.

Salem is not particular to the soils that it will grow in. Its self-sterile flowers bloom by mid-season. Self-fertile pollinators that bloom with it include, Catawba, Concord, Delaware, Iona, Empire State, Jefferson, Niagara, Winchell, and Worden.

Its harvest date is early for a Rogers hybrid and it ripens mid-season along with Concord or even before. The berry is large to very large. Its cluster is medium to large, compact, short and broad, tapering to cylindrical, that is shouldered. The skin of the berry is a rather thick non-slip skin which adheres to the pulp.

This is a dual-purpose grape. It is a handsome fruit of quality for the table and makes a high quality white wine for a *labrusca-type* grape. It has a soft *labrusca*/Muscat nose, with a delicately rich aromatic, sprightly, and vinous flavor. Salem is relatively low in sugar at 17˚ Brix, with low acidity like Delaware.

Vergennes (*chance seedling, labrusca*) is a red grape that was found in the garden of William E. Greene (1810-1886) of Vergennes, Vermont in 1874. Vergennes wines, both dry and semi-dry, are quality white *labrusca-type* wines that are still produced by Arbor Hill Winery in the Finger Lakes.

The vine is generally winter hardy and productive to very productive. Vergennes produces a large berried attractive bright colored red grape. The clusters are of medium size and length, broad and cylindrical to tapering, and of variable compactness, but generally are loose. Overall, the vine is healthy and somewhat resistant to fungus diseases. It is a safe and productive variety for marginal vineyard sites. Vergennes flowers by mid-season to late season, whose flowers are semi-sterile. The variety ripens late about one to two weeks after Concord.

It is my hope that growers and wineries in the Northeast who are looking for "new" grape varieties to cultivate and wines to produce will consider these locally developed heirloom pink and light red wine grape varieties. Further, that those interested in low or no spray programs to produce grapes organically will consider these grape varieties. This article is based on the author's over forty years of experience growing cool climate grapes in Athens and Middle Hope, NY and making wine from them; and *Grapes of the Hudson Valley and Other Cool Climate Regions of the United States and Canada,* by J. Stephen Casscles (Coxsackie, N.Y.: Flint Mine Press, 2015). This book has more information on many of the grapes covered by this article. (the book is available at www.flintminepress.com). The author's email address is cassclesjs@yahoo.com.