

## Grapes: Home winemaking season arrives

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reads 25, 26, even 27 brix.

The excitement is palpable at Corrado's, which begins receiving grapes by the truckload from California's Central Valley in early September. By season's end in mid-October, 100-plus trailers full of 30 grape varieties will have passed through the store.

The grapes are unloaded, and the winemakers arrive — both neophytes and Italian grandfathers who made wine in the old country — to peruse the cartons of grapes and decide which wines to make this year.

"This guy's going to taste that grape and go to another crate and taste another one," says Victor Nunziata, who wanders the floor, clipboard in hand, ready to aid customers in need. "If they've been doing this for years, they know if this grape has enough sugar."

For those who haven't been making wine for years, Nunziata is there to help. The Naples native, who now lives in Totowa, learned to make wine from his father-in-law 49 years ago. After retiring three years ago, he's worked six days a week at Corrado's during September and October.

"I have people who come here next year and say, 'Thank you so much. I made such a nice wine,'" he says.

That, unfortunately, wasn't the case with Tammy and Mike Harris, here now to pick grapes for their fifth stab at a cabernet.

The couple from Wilkes-Barre, Pa., thought all they'd need to start making wine were an instructional book and video. Four years ago, they drove to Corrado's to pick up supplies and left with an expensive French oak barrel they'd been strongly advised against buying. A few months later, they were dumping the wine down the drain. It had gone sour.

"I thought, my husband's a physician, he knows chemistry. This isn't rocket science," says Tammy Harris. She shakes her head. "It didn't work."

Each subsequent attempt was progressively better. The last two wines were drinkable, and their 2005 cabernet was the first that wasn't cloudy. This year, they're adding wood chips for more flavor.

"It's definitely a humbling experience," Tammy Harris says as her grapes are loaded into the crusher. "It made us appreciate what goes into making a great wine."

The Harris go home with bucketfuls of juice and a mix of grape stems and skins, called must. They'll let it ferment for about 10 days before using a presser to remove the must, which is then spread on their garden as fertilizer. The juice will eventually become wine.

Those who don't have a presser can just take home the juice and let it ferment without the must. According to Jimmy Corrado, who's in charge of the store's winemaking operations, as wine has become more popular, he's seen an increase in new-



Photos by MICHAEL KARAS / Herald News

Maria Frisolai of Millburn, her cart filled with empty wine bottles and corks, stands near crates of wine grapes at Corrado's winemaking center in Clifton last weekend.

### THE BASICS

**What:** Corrado's Winemaking and Home Brewing Center

**Where:** 600 Getty Ave., Clifton

**For:** The store stocks 17 red grape varieties and 10 different types of white grapes. The grapes will be available until about mid-October. It also stocks ingredients and equipment need to home brew beer.

**Phone:** 973-340-0848 or 888-778-WINE

**Web site:** www.corradosmarket.com

comers who pick out their grapes and have them crushed, de-stemmed and pressed at the store. If they make wine long enough, most eventually buy equipment, one piece at a time.

"If you buy it all at once, it's just too expensive," says Pete Toscano of Pequannock, who's here with his sister Maria Frederickson of Wayne.

Toscano began six years ago getting grapes crushed at the store, but since then he's bought his own equipment. The wine tastes better, he says, when he crushes it himself. He and Frederickson, who's never made wine before, settle on a syrah and then head over to the oak barrels. This will be their first year using a barrel to age the wine.

As for Tammy and Mike Harris' ill-advised barrel purchase, they haven't used it since that first year, but they're hanging on to it.

"We're going to try it again," Tammy Harris vows. "Maybe next year."



Cry Baby brand moscato grapes arrived by the crateful at Corrado's from California growers.

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## Techniques: Couscous fills up with spicy, saucy flavors

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### APRICOT AND PUMPKIN COUSCOUS

Makes 6 to 8 servings. Adapted from Hubert des Marais, executive chef at The Four Seasons Hotel and Resort in Palm Beach, Fla., where it's served at the Bistro restaurant.

- 1/4 cup sliced almonds
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1-1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 butternut squash or calabaza (about 2 pounds), peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded and cut into 3/4-inch dice
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated lemon zest
- 2 cups drained and rinsed canned chickpeas (one 19-ounce can)
- 2 cups homemade or low-sodium canned chicken broth
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped dried apricots
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
- Pinch of saffron or turmeric (optional)
- 1-1/2 cups couscous

Toast the almonds in a 350-degree oven until fragrant and lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.

Sauté the onion and garlic, stirring occasionally, until softened, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the ginger, cinnamon, cumin, cayenne and 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper; cook for 1 minute.

Add the squash, tomato paste, lemon zest, chickpeas and broth, and bring to a simmer. Cook, uncovered, for 20 to 30 minutes, until the squash is tender. Stir in the apricots, cilantro and mint. Remove cinnamon stick. Taste for seasoning.

Meanwhile, bring 2 cups water to a boil with 1/2 teaspoon salt and the saffron. Put couscous in a heat-proof bowl; pour in boiling water. Cover tightly with plastic wrap; let stand 5 minutes. Uncover; fluff with a fork. Serve couscous with squash and sauce. Top with toasted almonds.

*Each serving contains approximately 372 calories (25 percent of calories from fat), 10.6 grams total fat (1.3 grams saturated fat, 6.9 grams monounsaturated fat), 0 cholesterol, 10.9 grams protein, 61.3 grams carbohydrates, 8.2 grams fiber, 330.5 milligrams sodium.*