

Grapes!

I would never have thought of Grapes as a category, but I kept seeing them on so many covers...

The cultivation of the domesticated grape began 6,000–8,000 years ago in the Near East. Yeast, one of the earliest domesticated microorganisms, occurs naturally on the skins of grapes, leading to the discovery of alcoholic drinks such as wine. The earliest archeological evidence for a dominant position of wine-making in human culture dates from 8,000 years ago in Georgia (not the state!). The oldest known winery was found in Armenia, dating to around 4000 BC. By the 9th century AD, the city of Shiraz was known to produce some of the finest wines in the Middle East. Thus it has been proposed that Syrah red wine is named after Shiraz, a city in Persia where the grape was used to make Shirazi wine. Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics record the cultivation of purple grapes, and history attests to the ancient Greeks, Phoenicians, and Romans growing purple grapes for both eating and wine production. The growing of grapes would later spread to other regions in Europe, as well as North Africa, and eventually in North America.

In North America, native grapes belonging to various species of the *Vitis* genus proliferate in the wild across the continent, and were a part of the diet of many Native Americans, but were considered by European colonists to be unsuitable for wine. *Vitis vinifera* cultivars were imported for that purpose.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, 75,866 square kilometers of the world are dedicated to grapes. Approximately 71% of world grape production is used for wine, 27% as fresh fruit, and 2% as dried fruit.

