

Los Angeles Times FOOD

Kyoho Grapes: How to choose, store and prepare



Most of the grapes you'll find in the supermarket are sweet and crunchy and not much else.

But other varieties of grapes are becoming popular. If you love that old-fashioned grape jelly flavor, look for the Kyoho. It is ironic that the best-flavored American grape you can buy was actually developed and popularized in Japan.

A little background: There are two families of grapes – those that came from Europe (*Vitis vinifera*) and those that are native to the Americas (*Vitis labruscana*). The latter are known for their "foxy" flavor, familiar from commercial grape juice, grape jelly and Passover wine. The best-known *labruscana* variety is the Concord, the basis of the New York grape industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries. But Concord doesn't grow particularly well in the California climate, and as the grape-growing industry moved West, it shifted from native varieties to European.

However, in Japan, where European grapes suffer in the humid climate, American varieties grow well. And in the early 20th century, Japanese breeders cross-bred the Concord to develop the Kyoho. Today it is the most popular variety in Japan, accounting for a third of all of the table grapes grown. And based on that popularity, in the last decade it has staged a comeback in California -- proving you can go home again.

How to choose: Like other black grapes, Kyohos should be dark and glossy. They should be firm but not rock hard.

How to store: Store grapes in the refrigerator. Don't wash them until just before serving them.

How to prepare: Because of their sweet, grapey flavor, Kyohos are terrific when paired with salty cheeses, particularly blues.

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