

Muscat of Alexandria Grape Culture Developed in Okayama (3)

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Summary

Muscat of Alexandria grapes have been produced under the most intensive and elaborate management in Okayama since the Meiji era. The grape clusters were considered to be the most delicious and beautiful fruit in Japan and usually were purchased at the highest price among all fruits. However, the price has been gradually decreasing during the last decade. Growers make great efforts to enhance berry size, since clusters with bigger-sized berries are sold at higher prices in markets than those with smaller berries. Over fertilization of vineyard soil, frequent shoot-tip pinching, and even unapproved chemical treatments became widespread, but such laborious and expensive vineyard practices usually made the berries unsavory. Questionnaires to Muscat consumers, however, revealed that most of them require well ripened and savor Muscat clusters, not good-looking ones, at cheap prices. These facts suggest that Muscat grapes are nowadays mainly purchased not for presenting to other people but for enjoying their delicious flavor. Consumers also want to buy Muscat grapes in smaller units, such as a one cluster package and cut clusters. Two cluster packages, a traditional package system of Muscat growers, are thought to be too large by most consumers. New trials for producing savory Muscat clusters with labor saving management have been recently developed. Researchers in the Okayama Prefectural Experimental Station for Agriculture Technology have already demonstrated a new system to produce small-sized clusters by modifying cluster trimming before flowering time and another new planting system using root-zone restricting beds and vertical shoot positioning. The system enriches the berry aroma by controlling water deficit stress during growth. Further possibilities to satisfy consumer's demands by developing new systems for vine cultivation and cluster management.