

The Etna Estate & in suo bosco



An apparently impervious terrain conceals a well-kept secret: vineyards cultivated with passion and tenacity on Europe's highest active volcano. There where the earth expresses its infinite power, the finesse of volcanic wines testifies to all the fascination of mountain viticulture.



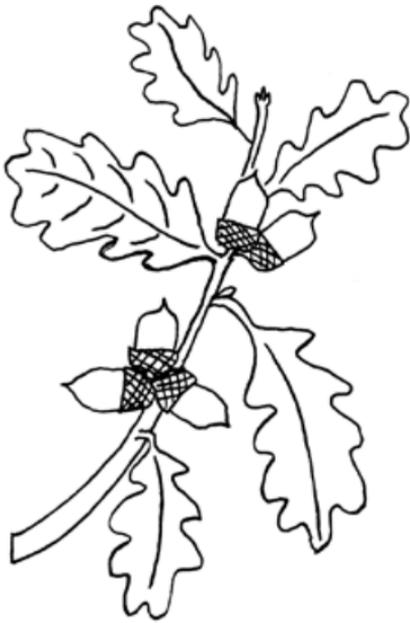
Etna e il suo bosco *(Etna and its surrounding woodland)*

Donnafugata's winery and vineyards in Randazzo are located on Mount Etna's northern slope, between 700 and 750 metres above sea level. The winery is located within **Etna Park**, which, with an area of 59,000 hectares, was the first to be established among Sicily's parks in 1987. In 2013, Etna - *a Muntagna* in Sicilian dialect, the highest active volcano in Europe, was added to the World Heritage List, becoming a World Heritage Site. The agricultural landscape surrounding the Donnafugata winery, with terraces, vineyards, and *palmenti* (stone buildings where wine used to be made), is nestled

among woods and lava flows,
forming a special environmental
mosaic. Crossing the vineyards,
looking at the mountain and
walking through the woods are
not the only sensations: there is
an amazing quantity of wild herbs
that fill up the senses, whatever the
season.

Downy oak

[*Quercus pubescens*
Willd., 1805]



In the woods around the winery you will find the most widespread oak species: the **downy oak**, a slow-growing tree that is easy to recognise in winter as, unlike other oak species, it keeps its dry leaves attached to the branches.

The main method of identifying the species is to observe the leaves or buds as they are covered with a fine down that can be easily detected by touch. Its hardiness and resilience, mainly due to the enormous vitality of the trunk, have enabled the downy oak to resist human intervention over time.

Sweet chestnut

[*Castanea sativa*]



Interspersed with the downy oak is the **sweet chestnut** (*Castanea sativa*), an exceptionally long-lived tree with majestic foliage that can reach a height of 20-30 m. It has deciduous leaves, 10-20 cm long, with a serrated margin and pointed apex. In addition, the

leaves are a deep glossy green, paler on the underside, petiolate and have an alternate insertion on the twigs. Its fruit is a nut, called a **chestnut**, entirely covered by a spiny dome, known as the cupule, which opens when ripe to release the chestnuts inside. The sweet chestnut is present on all of the volcano's slopes, where it colonises the oldest soils, between 300 and 1700 metres above sea level. Its spread has been facilitated by man thanks to the chestnut's many uses. Its ancient presence on Etna is confirmed by a thousand-year-old specimen like the **Castagno dei Cento Cavalli** ("hundred horse") sweet chestnut, located in the Sant'Alfio area.

The undergrowth

Depending on the season, the **undergrowth** is filled with **cyclamens** with their distinctive purple flowers, the **wild**



periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) that forms extensive carpets, **wild irises**, the endemic **Mount Etna violet** (*Viola aethnensis*) with its characteristic

flower from which it takes its name, small wild orchids such as ***Barlia robertiana***, asphodels, and colourful catchfly meadows.



There is also a surprising amount of wild herbs that, depending on the season, can be recognised along the way. Many of these plants have dialectal names and are used in the local cuisine like **Borage** (*Borrago officinalis*), **Wild asparagus** (*Asparagus acutifolius*), **Wild fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*), **Meadow buttercup** (*Ranunculus acris*), **Cat's ear** (*Hypochoeris radicata*), **Mediterranean Cabbage** (*Brassica fruticulosa*) and also **Black bryony**, **razze** and **bamuscitte**.

Black Bryony

[*Dioscorea communis*]



On Etna, this species can be found up to 1400 metres above sea level and is fairly frequent on all of the slopes, with the exception of the eastern side, where it is rarer. The black bryony contains numerous toxic substances (saponins, phenanthrene, etc.), which are mainly present in the berries.

The **spring shoots**, i.e. the edible part of the plant called the turion in which the toxic substances are found only in negligible quantities, can be eaten. Black bryony turions have a bitter-savoury taste and are cooked in the same way as asparagus or butcher's broom, blanched in plenty of water to reduce their acrid taste. The use of **black bryony turions** for food is only found in the Etna region; in other parts of Italy, with rare exceptions, it is unknown or considered inedible. The dialectal name, *sparacognu*, used in Randazzo, is ambiguous because in many other localities of Etna and Sicily it refers to the wild asparagus or butcher's broom.

Butcher's broom

[*Ruscus aculeatus*]



The edible part of the **butcher's broom** plant is the turion, i.e. the young asparagus-like shoot that appears from late March-April. Its bitterish fruits are called *bamuscitte*.

White radish

[*Raphanus raphanistrum*]



Among the edible species, white radish - known locally as **razza** - has a full flavour, somewhere between sweet and bitter, and can be encountered along agricultural paths. It is an annual herbaceous plant. It has lyrate leaves and the flowers have four

creamy white petals. The sepals, i.e. the outer part of the flower calyx, are purple. The leaves are spatulate, i.e. narrower at the base and wider at the apex. The fruits are “siliques” (small pods). The edible parts of the *razza* - which has a high sulphur content - are the non-flowering tops, *spicuneddi*, the tender leaves and the basal part of the stem (*colletto*). It has a strong, slightly spicy flavour and is very reminiscent of the more famous Mediterranean cabbage.

The Gardens of Donnafugata: a project to enhance biodiversity

Sustainability is a value that forms part of Donnafugata's DNA. For over thirty years, the company has been committed to producing wines that respect both the environment and humanity, convinced that caring for the earth is caring for the quality of production, encouraging a mutually beneficial relationship between wine and the plant world. Since 2008 Donnafugata has been a supporter of **FAI - Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano** (National Trust for Italy), with which it shares the mission of preserving the Italian landscape. The decision to create gardens and green spaces and to contribute to the protection of

natural areas is a cultural gesture, to restore **biodiversity** and **beauty** to the landscape. A choice that takes practical form not only in the Randazzo estate and the unique landscape that surrounds it, but also in a series of projects conceived specifically for each of the estates. The restoration of a **Giardino Pantesco** (Pantellerian Garden) in the contrada Khamma winery, in Pantelleria; the **Contessa Entellina garden**, an embroidery conceptualised by Gabriella Anca Rallo's green thinking to connect the estate with the agricultural landscape in which it is immersed; the creation of **aromatic herb** tubs in the Acate winery, a perfect example of integration between the agricultural and natural landscape; and finally, the desire to house,

in fall, a **collection of ancient Kolymbethra citrus fruits** in the historic Marsala wineries. Thanks to this attention to green spaces, a visit to one of Donnafugata's five estates is an experience that involves several senses: the tasting exploration of the wines and flavours of the land is accompanied by a visual and olfactory discovery of nature that becomes memory, emotion and aesthetic gratification.



DONNAFUGATA®

Artwork Julia Binfield

La visita in una tenuta
Donnafugata si configura come
un'esperienza che coinvolge
più sensi: all'esplorazione
gustativa dei vini e dei sapori
del territorio si affianca una
scoperta visiva e olfattiva della
natura che diviene ricordo,
emozione e appagamento
estetico.

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