

ACCENT HOME & GARDEN

Good Spirits

Wines to Accompany a Summer BBQ

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By Ken Sternberg



I need to be honest and admit to having a serious problem. I'm crazy about grilled and barbecued food. Some might claim I am addicted, but that's nonsense. I could ignore smoky, tender, finger-licking pork ribs or crispy, golden-crust chicken dripping with tangy sauce anytime I choose. I just choose not to. While some oddballs wait for summer, I grill outside all year round, especially during blizzards. Addiction? Not at all. For me, one of life's ultimate pleasures is sitting in my yard with friends on a warm summer evening, eating chicken, shrimp, ribs, salmon, steaks, or hamburgers that have reached their succulent, aromatic peak, while drinking wines that blend with and enhance the food's flavors. If anything trumps that scenario, let me know.

Although many kinds of food and wine complement each other, wine with grilled and barbecued fare may be the perfect match. As proteins in the meat heat and caramelize, the process creates a subtle sweetness that plays off nicely against wines whose flavors are concentrated and fruit-forward. These are qualities that help wines stand out from the bold and savory flavors inherent in outdoor cooking. Portobello mushrooms, asparagus, peppers, eggplant, and many other vegetables offer similar satisfaction. Fruit-forward wine doesn't necessarily mean overly sweet, but if you crave spicy barbecue sauce on your baby back ribs or grilled chicken, you'll find that a little sweetness can be refreshing.

A clear winner in this segment is white wine made from riesling, one of the most food-friendly wines in general. Many rieslings, especially ones from Germany or New York, have a minerally melange of peach, orange, and tangy lime-flavor components, backed by firm, refreshing acidity that complements many foods. Chenin blanc and sauvignon blanc (the

latter goes especially well with poultry or seafood) are also good. For dishes lower on the heat scale, wines that are ripe, rich, and fruity hold the most promise. These include reds made from zinfandel or shiraz (aka syrah), or from Rhone Valley grape varieties, such as syrah, mourvedre, carignan, and grenache. Even with spicy foods, putting a slight chill on a syrah or Beaujolais (35 minutes in the refrigerator) works wonders. Rosé is another fine choice. And of course, cabernet sauvignon is so right with steak that it should be pictured beside it in the dictionary.

There are many delicious wines that are tailor-made for grilled and barbecued foods. Here are some I especially enjoy:

Red

2005 Langmeil “Three Gardens,” \$18. A fabulous Australian blend of shiraz, grenache, and mourvedre that shows luscious bright, ripe fruit, a velvety richness, and penetrating acidity. Balance, complexity, structure, and depth are perfect. (Epicurean Wines, 206 923–1376)

2004 Clos des Camuzeilles, VdP de l’Aude, Carignan, \$21. This gem from France’s Fitou area provides pure, hedonistic concentration and fruit. Shows beautiful balance of tannins, fruit, and acidity. (Millesimes Fine Wine Traders, 617-734–0044)

2003 Clos des Camuzeilles “Grangette” Carignan/Grenache, \$24. Deep, dense cherry, plum, and other red fruit dominate the flavors in this well-crafted wine, accented by wafts of coffee and clove. A gorgeous wine from a producer worth watching.

White

2005 Ken Forrester “Petit Chenin” Chenin Blanc, \$10. A lovely example of typical South African chenin blancs, this shows fresh, lively acidity, intense citrus and floral qualities, and a terrific balance and finish. I could drink this every day, especially with shrimp or fish. And at this price, it won’t hurt.

2006 Dr. Frank Semi-Dry Riesling, \$16. Perfect for spicy food, this New York State riesling highlights tropical flavors, a bit of sweetness, and a great backbone of acidity to balance it out. (Konstantin Frank Wine Cellars, 800 320–0735)



Rosé

2006 S.C. Pannell Grenache, \$17. If you think you dislike rosés, this one will convert you. True to its Australian roots, the wine shows uncommon richness and concentration, along with exquisite aromas of rose petals, melon, and crushed berries whose presence lingers on the palate. Focused, refreshing, and totally delicious. (Epicurean Wines, 206 923–1376)