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How to Pair Wine and Food Like a Pro

Whether you're a bona fide chef or habitual takeout customer, pairing the perfect wine to your food is a surefire way to wow your next dinner guests (just be sure to hide those takeout containers before the guests arrive). Even though it might sound like a daunting task, there are **five basic rules to pair wine with food** to follow that are sure to convince your guests that you're a seasoned sommelier.

[IMAGE]

Pairing Rule #1: Know Your Dish's Flavor Profile

Your meal will no doubt contain several elements: a main ingredient, side dishes, seasoning, and sauces. When considering pairings, always match your wine choice to the most prominent element of your dish. It could be your protein, like the chicken or cut of beef, but it doesn't have to be. That super-garlicky sauce might be the star of your dish, or maybe it's the bitterness of your broccoli rabe. The trick is to identify what flavor will make the biggest impact on your guests' palates and pair the wine to that flavor.

The 6 main flavor profiles for food to consider for wine pairings are:

1. Sweet
2. Spicy
3. Salty
4. Bitter
5. Acidic
6. Fatty

[IMAGE]

Pairing Rule #2: Know Your Wine's Flavor Profile

Identifying your meal's most prominent flavor is perhaps the easier part of Rule #1. If you're new to wine tasting, you might find it a little harder to figure out every wine's prominent flavor. While each bottle has its own uniqueness, there are a few rules about flavor you can use for each kind of wine.

The main flavor profiles for white wine are:

Chardonnay: fruity/sweet, buttery (the most full-bodied white)

Sauvignon Blanc: fruity/tart, acidic, driest

Pinot Grigio: crisp, clean, dry

Riesling: sweet, fruity

Moscato: sweet and fruity, heavier than Riesling

The main flavor profiles for red wine are:

Cabernet Sauvignon: full-bodied, rich, herbal

Pinot Noir: lighter-bodied, fruity, fresh

Merlot: medium-bodied, fruity, spicy

Pairing Rule #3: Choose Your Wine Pairing Method

Once you've identified the main flavor of your dish and grasp the basic flavor profiles of wines, you're ready to pair. That doesn't mean the two flavors have to be the same, however. When it comes to wine pairing, there are two approaches you can take.

Congruent Wine Pairing

Congruent pairings are probably what most people assume is meant by wine pairings in general. They are pairings consisting of two similar flavor profiles, like a nice, rich, cheesy dish with a buttery Chardonnay. The two work together to magnify one particular flavor, which is sure to delight and impress your guests.

Complementary Wine Pairing

Complementary pairings consist of two contrasting flavor profiles that balance each other out. While your cheesy Chardonnay pairing might drench your guests in decadent richness, it also might send them right to the couch before the dessert you bought (don't forget to hide the box!). If you're planning to make it a longer evening, you might want to consider a complementary wine pairing for your cheesy goodness instead. A crisp and clean Pino Grigio would cut through the fat nicely, invigorating your guests back to life.

If you're still not confident in your pairing prowess, here are a few wine and food pairings that are considered foolproof by many people – even sommeliers.

10 of the best food and wine pairings:

1. Red meat with Cabernet Sauvignon
2. Seafood with Pino Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc
3. Lighter spicy dishes with Riesling
4. Heavier spicy dishes with Merlot

5. Cheesy dishes with any white
6. Light and sweet dishes with Pinot Grigio
7. Spicy/sweet dishes with Riesling
8. Fatty dishes with any red
9. Acidic dishes with Pinot Grigio
10. Very salty or sweet dishes with sparkling wines

Pairing Rule #4: Consider Pairing Food With a Sparkling Wine

Yes. That's right. Food and wine pairing isn't just for still wines. And we all know the sound of popping corks always makes a dinner party more festive. At the same time, some of us might be surprised to learn that all bubbly is not champagne. Champagne only comes from Champagne, France. That's easy to remember, right? As for the rest: here's a quick, down-and-dirty guide for how to pair food with sparkling wine.

The 5 most common types of sparkling wine are:

Champagne – slightly fruity but not sweet

Prosecco – sweeter

Cava – dry, citrusy, tart

Sparkling Rosé – more depth than a white sparkling, fruitier than their still counterparts

Sparkling Red – lighter and more complex than their still counterparts

The 4 basic dryness levels of sparkling wine (from sweet to dry) are:

Dulce

Sec

Dry

Brut

There are variations to each dryness level and wine type. But if you stick with those basics, you'll do just fine. Now, here are some sparkling wine pairing suggestions that are sure to get your dinner party bubbling with fun and deliciousness.

How to pair food with sparkling wine:

Very salty dishes with any Brut or Cava (try cheese plates or french fries)

Medium-salty or seafood with any Dry or Sparkling Rosé (try oysters or shrimp)

Fruit or sweets with any Dulce or Sparkling Red (if you really want to impress your guests with your pairing know-how, try Sparkling Cabernet with dark chocolate cake)

Pairing Rule #5: Remember That All Pairings Are Good Pairings

No matter how well (or poorly) you follow the first four rules for food and wine pairing, we're sure you'll ace the fifth. That's because we're talking about food and wine, two things that inherently pair well together to always make for a great time. And if by some crazy chance you don't totally nail it, well...you can always blame it on the delivery guy.