

Food and Wine Pairing Made Easy!

If you like to follow the rules then here are two basic ones that should get you through the night:

Rule One: Drink red wine with meat, white wine with fish and poultry.

Rule Two: Disregard rule one and eat and drink what you like. You will hear this over and over again and it's so true. Always go with your personal preference first!

Of course, there are some classic matches that satisfy again and again and bring out the best in both wine and food. Wine can often enhance the flavors of your food tantalizing your taste buds in ways you never knew possible and vice versa. A prime example...my husband HATES white wine. When he tries it he makes a face like someone just gave him a spoonful of cough syrup. One day we went to a wine and cheese pairing and he was given Blue Castello and Sauvignon Blanc. It was then that I heard words I never thought would come out of his mouth, "This wine is not bad. I actually like it." It was a breakthrough among breakthroughs! It was his first true experience of food enhancing wine and bringing out flavors in the wine he had never experienced before. Food can have that sort of magical effect on wine and when you find that magic you just can't help but searching for more of it.

Here are some of our favorite and classic food and wine pairings. I also like to say if you don't know what to serve, then serve champagne or sparkling wine. It's fun and extremely food friendly.

APPETIZERS & STARTERS

ANTIPASTO - Pinot Grigio, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz, Malbec

ARTICHOKES - Usually a no no with wine, but I love them with Chardonnay

ASPARAGUS - Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc

CARPACCIO (beef) - Pinotage, Shiraz, Shiraz/Pinotage blend, Malbec

CARPACCIO (tuna) - Sauvignon Blanc

CAVIAR - Chenin Blanc, Champagne!

COLD MEATS - Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay

NUTS AND/OR OLIVES - Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc

OYSTERS (raw) - Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc

PASTA SALAD - Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc

PASTA WITH CREAM SAUCE - Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc

PASTA WITH SHELLFISH - Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay

PASTA WITH TOMATO SAUCE - Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz

PASTA WITH VEGETABLES - Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Pinotage, Malbec

PATÉS - Chenin Blanc, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon

QUICHE - Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinotage Rosé, Merlot

SCALLOPS - Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio

SMOKED FISH (Trout, Herring) - Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc

SEAFOOD

CRAB - Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio

LOBSTER - Chardonnay, Chardonnay/Sauvignon blend, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc

MUSSELS - Chenin Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc

RED SNAPPER - Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio

SALMON - Pinotage Rosé, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio

SASHIMI, SUSHI - Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio

SHRIMP - Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio

STRIPED BASS - Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc

SWORDFISH - Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage, Pinot Grigio

TUNA - Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage, Merlot, Shiraz, Chardonnay

OTHER WHITE FISH - Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc

MEAT & POULTRY

CHICKEN - Chardonnay, Merlot, Chenin Blanc, Pinotage
CHICKEN SALAD - Chenin Blanc, Pinotage Rosé, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio
CHICKEN (smoked) - Pinotage, Merlot, Malbec
DUCK - Pinotage, Merlot, Pinotage Rosé, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Malbec
HAM - Shiraz, Merlot, Pinotage, Malbec, Pinotage Rosé
HAMBURGER - Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinotage, Shiraz, Malbec
LAMB (grilled, broiled) - Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage
PHEASANT - Pinotage, Shiraz, Malbec
QUAIL - Pinotage, Malbec
RABBIT - Pinotage, Merlot, Shiraz, Malbec
SAUSAGE - Chenin Blanc, Pinotage Rosé, Shiraz, Merlot, Malbec
STEAK (grilled, broiled) - Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage, Shiraz, Malbec
TURKEY - Merlot, Chardonnay, Pinotage Rosé
VEAL - Chardonnay, Merlot
VENISON - Shiraz, Pinotage, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec
COUSCOUS - Merlot, Shiraz, Pinotage Rosé
CURRY, FISH or CHICKEN - Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage Rosé
PIZZA - Merlot, Pinotage Rosé, Pinotage, Chenin Blanc, Malbec
SPICY CHINESE - Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage, Merlot, Pinotage Rosé
SPICY MEXICAN - Chenin Blanc, Shiraz, Malbec
THAI - Chenin Blanc, Pinotage, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio

CHEESES

*GOAT - SOFT: Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage
- HARD: Pinotage, Merlot, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon

*COW & SHEEP - MEDIUM: Pinotage, Shiraz
- HARD: Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Chenin Blanc, Pinotage, Sauvignon Blanc

If you are a true rule follower here are some more:

Generally, wines and foods belonging to the same culture are compatible; for example, think Italian wines with Italian food.

Good red wines tend to be dry and rich, sometimes with a tart or astringent quality. They will go better with hearty or highly seasoned foods such as beef, pork, game, duck, goose and pasta dishes. The 'red with red' rule works well because the astringency of the tannins cuts through the viscosity of the fat. Reach for a tannic Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinotage, Petite Syrah or Zinfandel, especially if the meat is served with a heavy sauce. Rare prime rib tastes almost sweet, so it's perfect with a lighter bodied Merlot or Beaujolais.

White wines are usually lighter in body and flavor and can range from dry and crisp to sweet and fragrant. Serve these wines with foods such as chicken, turkey, fish, shellfish, ham and veal. Pair a honey or brown sugar glazed ham with a white wine that's not too dry - possibly a Chenin Blanc, Gewurztraminer or Riesling.

Rosé wines are in fact pale red wines; their lighter color is due to the shorter time the skins are left with the juice during fermentation. Rosé, or blush, wines can range from dry to sweet. These wines should compliment ham, fried chicken, shellfish, cold beef and picnic style foods.

Ahhh, holiday stress. In my opinion if you can't decide what wine to serve, then serve Champagne. You can find a great budget friendly champagne that will really get the festivities kicked off in the right way. Gloria Ferrer has some really nice sparkling wines to try that won't hurt your wallet. OR...If you serve turkey with sweet side dishes like glazed carrots or sweet potatoes, choose a white wine with a hint of sweetness, like Chenin Blanc, Riesling or Gewurztraminer. If some dishes have a more savory flavor, try Sauvignon Blanc or a lighter bodied Chardonnay. For a bird with spicy sausage stuffing, serve Pinotage or a try a Pinot Noir.

Don't match strong to delicate. Pairing a big, powerful, high-alcohol or high-tannin wine with a light, delicate dish (and vice versa) is rarely a good idea.

Acidity is your friend. People tend to be wary of wines described as "high acid," like Sauvignon Blanc or Muscadet. But there's no better quality in a wine for matching rich, creamy or cheesy sauces, deep-fried foods or fish dishes; also note, tart wines go better with tart foods.

Follow the don't-upstage-the-star rule. If you have an amazing bottle of wine you want to show off, especially an older vintage (they tend to be more subtle, their flavors less flamboyant), don't serve a wildly complex dish with it. A simple dish will allow the wine to be the center of attention.

Dessert, or fortified wines, are heavier and sweeter than table wines and frequently have a higher alcohol content. They are usually served alone or with cheese, nuts, fruit or sweets at the end of the meal.

If you don't like rules, like me, then toss all of these out the door and start experimenting. I'd love to hear about combinations that have worked for you that you can't get enough of. My rule-breaking favorite is steamed artichokes dipped in butter and a nice oaky California style Chardonnay. Send me your favs and I'll post them here!

CHEERS!

About the Author

Jennifer de Jong is a long time wine drinker, enjoyer of wine, and non-wine-snob. She is the founder of *Vino Vixenz* a snob-free zone to [learn wine tasting](#) and go from wine lover to [wine expert](#) in days!

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