

Entertaining Wines

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Summer is a special time in Chicago, as we're outdoors and enjoying what life has to offer. Many summertime activities revolve around food and beverages. Picnics at the beach, parks and concerts, eating our way through food festivals or having a backyard BBQ are all ways we socialize with friends and family over food and drink.

Summertime home entertaining tends to be more casual. The trick with entertaining is to make your guests feel special. A nice selection of food and beverage can make your guests feel welcome and appreciated. Introducing your guests to a new dish or beverage can offer a nice conversation icebreaker and help make your party memorable. A new wine can help accomplish this. The goal is to find wines with broad appeal, that pair well with a wide variety of lighter fare, are refreshing and offer a new wine experience for your guests. The wines described next should do the trick.

Wines typically enjoyed in the warm summer months tend to be light, have some acidity and are fruity. Popular white wines include Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. The first two are light and offer good acidity. Chardonnay tends to be a bigger style and is not as acidic. Both styles are popular with guests. The trend setting challenge is to offer wines that are similar in style but potentially new to your guests. The following two white wine suggestions may accomplish this:

Pine Ridge is a quality California winery, probably best known for their Napa Valley Cabs. They also offer a unique white wine that is a personal favorite – a Chenin Blanc & Viognier blend. This wine is reasonably priced at \$11 and consistently receives 90 point ratings from Robert Parker. Chenin Blanc is a light, acidic wine with honeyed fruit notes. Viognier is a more full bodied style with lush apple and pear notes with floral aromas. So, this wine combines the three ideal summer wine elements, and is a good substitute for fans of Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc. The next white comes from the Sokol Blosser Winery in Oregon, best known for their Pinot Noir wines. They produce a unique wine called Evolution 9, a blend of 9 different white wine varietals, and retails for \$13. It is complex, has a medium to full body, has some acidity, offers tropical fruit notes and is an intriguing substitution for Chardonnay fans.

Red wines can be more challenging in the summer. Many reds are too heavy and tannic to enjoy during these hot months. The one exception would be pairing grilled steaks with Cabernet Sauvignon, a quintessential pairing year round. With this exception noted, many summer menus call for a light, less tannic wine that offers a refreshing experience. Some reds can be served slightly chilled, including Beaujolais, Pinot Noir and Argentinean Malbec. These wines are light to medium bodied, have low tannin levels and are fruity. This makes these wines very versatile, as they are easy sippers and pair well with most summer menus. I'm a big fan of

California Pinot Noirs and the movie Sideways helped popularize this wine in America. Since Pinots are a familiar wine, let's pick something different.

Malbec is another versatile red wine and is Argentina's claim to fame in the wine world. Argentinean Malbec is less tannic than French Malbec, has a dark purple color, a soft texture, fruity flavors, some spice notes and aromas of violets. It is often paired in Argentina with steak. Bodega Norton offers consistently high scoring wines at a reasonable price of \$14. The 2008 Reserva vintage scored 90 points with the Wine Spectator and is a personal favorite. The 2007 Reserva vintage was included in the Wine Spectator's Top 100 Wines of 2010! Another one to look for is Dominio Del Plata's Susan Balbo 2008 vintage, with a 91 point rating from the Wine Spectator, and sells for \$20. A third choice is the 2008 Benegas Malbec. This winery consistently achieves a 90 point rating from Robert Parker and sells for \$16.

Offer these wines to your guests and there is sure to be some happy faces and interesting conversation. Your home entertaining is sure to create a buzz with these crowd pleasers, as variety is the spice of life.

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