

The perfect season for drinking a little pink

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Thank goodness springtime's warmer days have finally arrived in Chicago! As we watch the flowers bloom, celebrate Mother's Day and recognize Breast Cancer Awareness, the color pink comes to mind. As it may be difficult for some to believe a pink-colored wine could actually be good, rosé wines are a welcome addition to your wine mix.

Lancers and Mateus rosés from Portugal and white zinfandel from California helped introduce Americans to wine. Portugal pioneered rosés in this country in the 1960s with Lancer's bottled in a ceramic carafe and Mateus in an oval-shaped glass bottle. They also made rosé wines difficult to accept by serious wine drinkers, ultimately hurting its image. Hopefully this column will help change this perception and encourage you to enjoy this delightful beverage this summer.

Wine speak

Rosé is a wonderful choice when the weather warms up and beer or mixed drinks are not appealing. It is a pleasant sipping beverage while visiting with friends on the back deck, at the beach or on a picnic.



The name rosé is French for pink or rose-colored. Rosé wines are made two different ways. The more difficult and less common approach is to blend white with red wine, as it is challenging to balance the colors and flavors. Most winemakers use red grapes and only allow the grape skins to stay in contact with the grape juice for two to three days. This creates a lighter body, less tannic wine. Rosé wines are lower in alcohol, slightly sweet and have good acidity, making them food-friendly.

Rosés are meant to be drunk when they are young and have fruity aromas and flavors that explode in your mouth. If you are a white wine drinker, select a lighter colored rosé and serve it chilled for a crisp, refreshing sip. If you are a red wine drinker, select a darker rosé and serve it less chilled for a fruitier, more full-bodied experience.

Europe has long had a love affair with rosé. Major European rosé regions include France's Anjou district in the Loire Valley, Tavel in Southern Rhone and Provence in Southern France. In Anjou, the better quality rosés are Cabernet Franc- and Cabernet Sauvignon-based. The wines of Tavel tend to be bold, muscular wines with robust, spicy berry flavors. These rosés have an appealing roughness and stand up to the local dishes that are laden with garlic, olive oil and fresh herbs. The major grape is Grenache and is blended with Cinsaut, Syrah or Mourvídre grapes. Provence's rosé is traditionally served with Southern France's signature dish Bouillabaisse and has earthy and dried herb notes.

Spain is another important rosé region and this wine is produced throughout the country. The northern area tends to produce a lighter style while southern Spain's rosés tend to have a darker, fruitier style. The primary grape varieties are Tempranillo and Garnacha.

Outside of Europe, Australia and Argentina are building a following with their rosés. California currently produces small quantities of rosés and they tend to be bigger and fruitier than their European counterparts. Red zinfandel is the base wine for some of California rosés.

Food pairings

In recent discussions about rosé wines with Steve Anthony at Binny's, rosé's color "doesn't lie." Lighter colored rosés tend to be softer and pair best with delicate dishes, like fish, salads and soft cheese. Darker rosés are in contact with grape skins longer (some up to seven days) and produce a bolder, fruity style with cherry, strawberry and raspberry notes. These are best served with barbecue pork, grilled veal and spicy dishes such as Chinese, Thai and Mexican. Many seafood dishes pair well with rosé and a personal favorite is grilled salmon.

The knowledgeable folks at the Wine and Cheese Shop by TCC in Plainfield agree we should not overlook this springtime, patio wine and remember to "Think Pink!"

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Bill's Picks

Torres de Casta of Southern Spain - \$11

Chateau De Trinquedel of Tavel - \$16

Domaines Ott of Bandol - \$38

Bodegas Muga of Rioja - \$11.00

Rosenblum Cellars North Coast of CA - \$12

Cabernet d'Anjou of Loire Valley - \$ 9

Chateau Mourgues du Gres of Languedoc - \$11