



EXTRA-ORDINARY WINES FOR THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is around the corner, and it's time to have the dark versus white discussion. No, we're not talking about turkey breasts or thighs here but rather which wine you serve to make your meal simply...extraordinary!

STORY: MARY ANN DESANTIS

Thanksgiving dinner includes an array of flavors and rich foods, but that's only half the challenge when it comes to pairing the best wines with your meal. There's also a variety of taste buds to consider. Some fam-

ily members prefer a traditional oven-roasted bird, while others want smoked or fried turkey. Adults love real cranberries; children prefer the canned concoction. Northerners want pumpkin pie; Southerners think sweet potato is tastier.

Guests' preferences can be just as eclectic when it comes to wine preferences. Some want sweet, others prefer dry. So how do you select wines for this sociable holiday that is all about enjoying and appreciating friends and family?

Author and popular host of "Wine Library TV," Gary Vaynerchuk recommends wines served at Thanksgiving should be lower in alcohol and lighter in weight, because it is going to be a long day and the food will be filling. The secret, says the author of *101 Wines: Guaranteed*

to Inspire, Delight and Bring Thunder to Your World, is to serve wines that won't overpower your head, your palate, or your wallet.

The combinations of salty, sweet, and savory foods can quickly overwhelm a wine's taste, so finding the best varietal to make your Thanksgiving meal extraordinary can be a challenge. Be creative and forget the adage to serve white wines with white meat. That is old-style thinking, not to mention boring. In fact, turkey makes some white wines seem bitter. Wine should enhance or bring out

the flavor of foods, not leave an odd aftertaste in your mouth.

You won't go wrong if you find wines you like, no matter what the critics and ratings say. I agree, but it helps to have suggestions from the folks who know wines. Visit local wine merchants (we are blessed to have several in this area) and describe your preferences to them, such as sweet, dry, fruity, or earthy. They will have recommendations to fit your budget.

Pair these exceptionally good wines with your Thanksgiving menu to make your meal extraordinary:

SANCERRE

On a trip to France, I was introduced to Sancerre, a white wine that is made with sauvignon blanc grapes. Earthier in taste than American sauvignon blancs, this wine can stand up to the rich side dishes on the dinner table and create a nice balance with roasted turkey. One of my favorites, available locally, is the 2014 Le Clos Chartier Sancerre.

PROSECCO

Sparkling Italian wines are a nice welcoming beverage for guests, especially in Florida where November afternoon temps may still be warm. Light and refreshing, Prosecco works as a pre-dinner cocktail that can move into the dining room where its nutty-fruity interplay works with traditional Thanksgiving foods. I prefer the extra-

dry, but Proseccos and other sparklers come in all levels of sweetness.

VOUVRAY

The first time I tasted Vouvray, a white wine produced from the chenin blanc grape, I was at someone else's holiday celebration. Vouvrays can range from bone-dry to extremely sweet. It's not a wine that I serve often, but the faint sweetness of the tendre style helps make it a perfect match with Thanksgiving dishes.

PINOT GRIS

Pinot Gris tends to be a rich wine with a spicy character and enough residual sugar to be round and fruity. Wineries in the Pacific Northwest produce Pinot Gris in the traditional French style, although they are generally fruitier than the

Alsation counterparts. This white wine works well with the sweeter dishes served at Thanksgiving.

PINOT NOIR

Pinot Noir is one of my staples at Thanksgiving. The fourth Thursday in November is a uniquely American holiday, so I like the idea of choosing a domestic Pinot. The rich fruit flavors, especially in the California varieties, are good matches with whatever you are serving. Lighter Pinot Noirs could get lost in all the different flavors competing at your table, but a rich, full-of-fruit-in-your-mouth Pinot Noir holds its own without overwhelming the lighter dishes.

ZINFANDEL

Zinfandel, an almost uniquely American wine, is another great choice. The lighter-styled Zins

combine the fruitiness of Pinot Noir with the elegance of Beaujolais. Zins are typically dry, but the fruity character adds a hint of sweetness and spice which works well with food.

CÔTES DU RHÔNE

The luscious taste of this aromatic French wine is a special treat at the Thanksgiving table. Soft, well-rounded blends will not overpower the food and will complement meats with rich gravies or sauces. The Le Pas de la Beaume Red Rhône, a blend of primarily grenache noir and syrah, is very affordable and therefore sells out quickly. Wine merchants can recommend other similar producers.



ABOUT THE WRITER
Living in Italy was the catalyst for Mary Ann DeSantis to understand more about wine, and she now enjoys sharing what she's learned. Since 2010, Saluté has covered topics for oenophiles of all levels – from novice wine drinkers to experienced connoisseurs. The column received a 2014 Florida Magazine Association Silver Award for Best Department and a 2012 Florida Press Club Excellence in Journalism Award for Commentary.