

Pairing Wine with the Thanksgiving Feast

When you are hosting a dinner party or holiday meal, decide in advance what wines you would like to serve, selecting ones that will complement your menu. If you are planning a party where everybody contributes a bottle of wine, ask each guest to bring a different wine until all the wine slots are filled. If you have friends who are interested in wine, you might even want to hold an informal wine tasting.

Basic Guidelines

Dinner Parties: The first consideration for a dinner party is whether to plan the wine around the food or vice versa. In most cases, the menu usually comes first, but if you want to show off a special wine or series of wines, then work forward from the wine.

Planning the Menu: In general, move from lighter to heavier foods and wines. Plan the menu course by course or wine by wine and decide which wines will work best with each dish.

How Many Wines: For a simple holiday meal, you might prefer to open only one wine and serve it right through to the dessert. If the wine is to be in the spotlight, however, you could serve a different wine with each course, in which case you will need to consider glassware. If you do not have enough glasses for each course and want to avoid washing them between courses, take a cue from wine professionals: When you are finished with one course and wine, pour a small amount of the next wine into the glass, swirl it briefly, then empty it into a pitcher or dump bucket. This works perfectly well going from white to red wine, but less well going from red to white.

Aperitifs: Before you sit down to dinner, a glass of sparkling wine is always a welcome aperitif. Alternatively, you could serve a white wine, such as Chardonnay, Mosel or a light Alsace wine. A classic aperitif is a well-chilled Fino or Manzanilla sherry. The distinctive flavor of sherry, combined with its delicate aromas, makes it a welcoming drink. It is always a good idea to serve appetizers with the opening drinks. Olives or salted nuts go particularly well with a glass of dry sherry.

Dessert Wines: The choice of a dessert wine depends on the meal preceding it. If it has been an extensive and heavy meal, you might want to serve a lighter, less alcoholic wine, such as a sweet Riesling or Muscat. For serving after dinner, the classic digestif is a tawny or vintage port.

Estimating Quantities: For a four-hour party with a few nondrinkers, most caterers recommend one-half to three-fourths of a bottle of wine per person. Of course, your knowledge of your guests may alter this rule of thumb. Most hosts would prefer to have wine left over than to run out before the guests leave. Many wine merchants will let you return unopened bottles.

Pairing Food and Wine

Pairing the right wine with food creates something greater than the sum of the parts. A complementary wine can enhance and add new dimensions to food, and vice versa. Matching food and wine is a fairly recent concept. In the past, people simply served the local foods with whatever wine was available, especially in wine-producing areas—an evolutionary, though not conscious, pairing. Over the years, the teaming of good food with fine wine has become an art form.

Basic Principles

There are two fundamental ways to approach pairing wine and food: Either match a rich, strongly flavored dish with an equally rich, powerful wine, or set off a strongly flavored, spicy plate of food with a light, acidic wine.

Acidity: The acids in wine and the natural acids in food must be considered when making a match. Acidity in a wine is very helpful in food pairings. An acidic wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc, is useful in balancing a rich or spicy chili-based dish.

Age/Maturity: An older wine may be overwhelmed by strong flavors. Let the complex flavors of the wine shine on their own against a simpler dish—for example, a grilled steak with an aged Bordeaux.

Body: Keep the body, or weight, of the wine in mind. A heavy, full-bodied wine will match well with a rich dish, such as beef bourguignonne.

Oak: A young wine that still tastes of oak tannins tends to obscure subtle foods. That is one reason why young, oaky Chardonnay is often best served as an aperitif with a salty snack. Subtle oakiness is not a problem.

Sweetness: A sweet wine is best matched with a high-acid food, such as a blue cheese. Sweet foods tend to distort wine flavors and make dry wines taste flat and insipid.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Guides, *The Wine Guide* (Time-Life Books, 1999).

Fill a large saucepan two-thirds full of water and bring to a boil over high heat. Fill a large bowl two-thirds full of ice water. Add 1 Tbs. salt to the boiling water along with the green beans and cook until bright green and still very crisp, about 2 minutes. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, immediately transfer the beans to the ice water. Let cool for 2 minutes, then drain the beans thoroughly and blot dry with paper towels. Set aside.

In a 12-inch fry pan over medium-high heat, melt the remaining 3 Tbs. butter and swirl to coat the pan. Add the green beans and sauté, stirring constantly, until the beans are heated through and crisp-tender, about 3 minutes. Add the lemon juice and almonds and sauté for 1 minute more. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a warmed serving bowl. Sprinkle with the panko topping and serve immediately. Serves 6 to 8.

Do ahead: This sauté is best when made right before serving. However, the green beans can be blanched up to 1 day in advance. Spread the cooled beans on dry paper towels or a clean cotton towel, roll up jelly-roll style and place in a sealed plastic bag. Remove from the refrigerator 2 hours before sautéing. The panko topping and toasted almonds can be prepared up to 1 day in advance. Cover and store in separate airtight containers at room temperature.

Adapted from *The New Thanksgiving Table*, by Diane Morgan (Chronicle Books, 2008).

Classic Pumpkin Pie

To add a fanciful finish to this pumpkin pie, use decorative cutters to create autumnal shapes from rolled-out pie dough. If desired, use the tip of a paring knife to create details on the cutouts, such as veins on the leaves. Then bake the cutouts and place them on the baked and cooled pie. When preparing this pie, be sure to use a deep-dish pie dish.

Preheat an oven to 375°F.

In a bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, cornstarch, salt, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves. Add the pumpkin, eggs, cream and milk and whisk to combine.

Pour the filling into the prebaked piecrust and bake until the center is set, 60 to 65 minutes, covering the edges of the crust with aluminum foil after 30 minutes if they brown too quickly.

Transfer the pie to a wire rack and let cool completely, at least 2 hours, before serving. Serves 10.

Tip: To prebake the piecrust, position a rack in the lower third of an oven. Place a cookie sheet on the rack. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Fit the pie dough into the pie dish, line the piecrust with parchment paper or aluminum foil and fill with pie weights. Place the pie dish on the preheated cookie sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the parchment and weights and bake until the crust is light golden brown, about 5 minutes more. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely, about 30 minutes.

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Turkey Roasting Basics (cont.)

- To ensure the most consistent results when roasting the turkey, insert a leave-in thermometer into the thickest part of the breast or thigh, away from the bone. The turkey is done when the breast registers 165°F and thigh, 175°F. This tool lets you know exactly when the turkey has reached the desired temperature without consistently having to pierce the flesh with an instant-read thermometer, losing juices in the process.

- Before carving the roasted turkey, let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes. This allows time for some of the juices to be absorbed back into the meat, making it more moist and easier to carve. You can loosely cover the bird with aluminum foil, but be sure that steam can escape or the skin will lose its crispness.

Ingredients for Classic Pumpkin Pie

1¼ cups firmly packed dark brown sugar

1 Tbs. cornstarch

½ tsp. salt

1½ tsp. ground cinnamon

½ tsp. ground ginger

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

¼ tsp. ground cloves

2 cups pumpkin puree

3 eggs

1 cup heavy cream

½ cup milk

Prebaked and cooled deep-dish piecrust

The Foolproof Potluck

You have a vision: an enjoyable evening filled with your closest friends and family, delicious food and lively conversation. You even know what you want to serve—a juicy turkey, traditional side dishes and, for a sweet finish, a classic pumpkin pie. The only problem is that you don't want to spend days laboring in the kitchen.

Think potluck, instead. You can still prepare the main course, but ask your guests to bring the appetizers, salad, side dishes and dessert. Don't hesitate to give them specific recipes, either. They'll be glad to receive your guidance. Remember, though, to match the talent of the cook to the difficulty of the dish. If you're inviting friends who can't or don't like to cook, ask them to provide a loaf of bread or a bottle of wine that will complement the roast turkey.

Once everyone arrives, it's entertaining in a snap. Put the finishing touches on the dishes, set up the buffet and relax in the company of your friends and family.

Turkey Roasting Basics

One of the oldest and simplest forms of cooking, roasting is a technique that involves cooking food in an uncovered pan in the dry heat of an oven. One of the most appealing qualities of roasted foods is the beautiful and delicious brown crusts that develop in the oven. This irresistible counterpoint of caramelized crust and tender interior makes roasting a favorite cooking method for turkey. These tips will help you roast a turkey to perfection:

- Bring the turkey as close as possible to room temperature. Remove it from the refrigerator 1 hour before roasting, but no longer—the maximum time allowed for food safety.

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Technique Class: Back to Basics—A Classic Thanksgiving

Selecting the Turkey

Fresh turkeys are easy to find during the holidays and taste immeasurably better than frozen ones, which will have drier meat. If possible, choose a fresh bird that was raised free range and fed organic grain. These turkeys have more flavor than those raised on factory farms and can be ordered from specialty butchers or natural-foods stores. Avoid self-basting turkeys, which are injected with a yellow, fatty substance to keep them moist. If you choose a free-range, organic turkey, be sure to follow the turkey packer's tips on roasting, which usually accompany the bird. These turkeys may require different roasting techniques than ordinary supermarket varieties.

What Size Turkey to Buy

For the best results, buy a turkey that weighs more than 10 lb. If you want a smaller bird, a turkey breast is a better choice. To ensure ample servings for Thanksgiving dinner as well as generous leftovers, allow for 1 to 1½ lb. of turkey per person.

Storing the Turkey

Plan to pick up a fresh turkey the day before you will be roasting it and store the bird in its original wrapping in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Frozen turkeys should also be kept in the refrigerator as they thaw to keep bacteria from multiplying. Allow 24 hours for every 4 lb. of turkey. Depending on your refrigerator temperature, a 12-lb. bird should thaw in 3 days. Thawed turkey should be cooked within 2 days and should not be refrozen, or the texture of the meat will suffer.

About Brining

A traditional method of preserving foods before the days of refrigeration, brining is a cooking technique that is regaining popularity. Chefs and home cooks alike are discovering that a good brine bath adds flavor and juiciness to the classic roasted turkey. It has become one of the most popular choices of preparing the turkey before roasting.

A brine penetrates into food much more deeply than a marinade. Water from the brine enters each meat cell, making the meat juicier while infusing it with flavor. Brining helps keep the meat juicy without giving it a salty taste—you'll never have to worry about serving a dried-out holiday bird again.

