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Barbecue and Wine - Perfect for Summer Fun

Summer is here for sure, and Independence Day, Sunday this year, is just around the corner. So set up the BBQ, get out the eats, uncork the wine and enjoy the fireworks!!

Many great wine choices can work well with the strong, spicy, sweet and smoky flavors of barbecued meats and fish. However, to compliment the big flavors, the wines you serve must be assertive, but not expensive. Keep your high priced "Chateau Something" for a formal occasion where foods with more subtle flavors will allow the wine to shine. Lower and mid-priced wines are the way to go, and there are plenty to choose from.

For a guaranteed crowd pleaser, mix up a fruity Sangria. Combine a red wine, brandy, fruit and ice and you will have a perfect blend that stands up to spice and sauce. Remember that Sangria goes down like fruit juice but kicks like a mule, so be sure not to make it too strong.

Dry rosé is another all-purpose barbecue favorite and a perfect summer wine. Served chilled, good rosés combine the crispness and refreshment of white wine with a symphony of intriguing flavors - notes of tea, orange rind, strawberries and watermelon along with some of the fruits typical of red wines.

There's nothing like sparklers with fireworks! Sparkling wines are a sure bet with barbecue. Those tiny bubbles act like palate scrubbers so that every bite of your barbecue tastes like your first. Inexpensive sparklers like Prosecco, Cold Duck and Asti Spumante work well, but feel free to climb up the price point ladder a bit and purchase some good sparklers from California, Spain or Italy. Don't forget blush sparkling wines. They'll be great too!

Red wines make a natural pairing with steak because the puckery tannins help to balance out the fat in beef. When you choose red wine to go with grilled or barbecued meats, make sure that the ones you choose have big flavors but are well balanced, smooth and not too heavy in the alcohol department. Wines that have over 14.5% alcohol are not a good choice with barbecue because they open up the taste buds allowing the heat from the barbecue spices to become very prominent and overwhelm other flavors.

For steak, ribs and hamburgers, Bordeaux, young Cabernets, Barolo and young spicy Zins with lots of black pepper and raspberry are perfect choices. Reds that have great fruit and balanced acidity, ripe berry flavors and complex spice make an interesting flavor contrast to barbecue. When the dish is hot and spicy a good Syrah/Shiraz with red berry and ripe fruit flavors and silky, smoky tannins works well as does a Malbec. More great choices include Barbera, Chianti, and Beaujolais, all served slightly chilled. Also consider a spicy, fruity Spanish Rioja with its bold, fresh flavors that stand up to barbecued brisket, ribs and all types of grilled beef. Riojas are intended to be drunk at a slightly cool temperature. Chilling wines disarms any rough tannins and volatile alcohol.

A caveat with regard to pairing red wines with barbecue: In most of the United States barbecue season is very hot: Red wines tend to lose their aromas in hot weather, feel flabby on the palate, and aren't refreshing.

White wines can be the answer here. A cool and refreshing match for an outdoor summer feast, crisp, intensely aromatic high-acid white wines like Sauvignon Blanc pair beautifully with grilled chicken and fish. Sauvignon Blanc is also great with grilled vegetables and is a great choice for tomatoes. To go with a fattier fish, like tuna, trout, or rockfish choose a white Burgundy or Chardonnay. Slightly sweet Rieslings and Gewurztraminers also can pair nicely with spicy and sweet barbecue flavors. Many other inexpensive whites will also go perfectly. Try Chenin Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Muscadet, Verdichhiio, and Pinot Gris.

So light those fires and set those grills on high. Great barbecuing, great wines and a great 4th to everyone!! La Chaim!!!

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