

A Guide to Wines for the Backyard Barbecue

Summertime is fast approaching and with it comes the summer barbecue season. Grilling on the patio with good food and good friends is very near the top of my list for summertime relaxation. Making the picture complete is a selection of wines to accompany the food.

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Let's start with Pork. Fortunately, pork has managed to delete all the bad press it received as a WW II fatty meat and has found its place on many menus, and in many versions – pulled, roasted, smoked, barbecued, etc. Long considered a white meat only, it is now included in the red meat category and this makes it a perfect candidate for a myriad of wine selections to serve at the patio party. Now do not go out and spend a boatload of money on expensive wine. With pork, select a North Coast Pinot Noir. (\$15) The pinot from that region will be medium to full bodied and flavored with fruit like as raspberry, cherry, and strawberry. Although white meat calls for a white wine, the cooking method can elevate pork to a red. If a white wine is mandatory because of personal taste, select a Fume Blanc from Robert Mondavi. (It should be around \$18.) Fume Blanc is a variation on Sauvignon Blanc and was first introduced by Robert Mondavi in 1968.

Roasted red meats are the next choice for our outdoor party. Linda Johnson-Bell in her book on food matching says it best: "Grilled or roasted red meats are not difficult to match. Think Sunday roast and July barbecues; think full, ripe, and mature; think Pomerol, New World Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrahs, Cornas, Hermitage, Chateauneuf du Pape, St. Emilion, and Zinfandel. Both the red meat and the methods of grilling and roasting can take heavier textures and weights, so bring on the tannins, acids, and red wines with plenty of ripe fruit. No fresh young things allowed here." Ms. Bell is correct and I agree. All of the wines mentioned above are full bodied. However notice where they are from: Bordeaux, The US, The Rhone, and Australia. You could also easily add a full-bodied Rioja from Spain or a Super Tuscan from Italy.

There are so many red meats to serve at a barbecue, and my own personal preference is Filet mignon. With the Filet I would choose a Merlot from Napa; perhaps a Duckhorn (\$32). The Filet is subtle in flavor, so I go for a wine that won't overwhelm the meat and, at the same time, will go well with grilled vegetables.

Ribs are next. Ribbs are very popular in the Lowcountry and they are readily available year-round. Whether you enjoy your barbecued ribs with a dry rub or a rub that is moist, try to find a Shiraz, preferably one from Australia. In my opinion Shiraz from Australia was born to accompany barbecued ribs. You will find that it reveals firm tannins, and concentrated black fruit that can stand up to the meatiest of ribs.

Let's try fish next; I'll put it in list form for quick reference. As far as I know, these are the fish most commonly enjoyed in the Lowcountry:

Scallops: Best with a white wine – Pouilly-Fuisse

Clams: Best with a white wine – Chablis or a Pinot Grigio

Grouper: Best with a white wine – Any white from Piedmont

Halibut: Best with a white wine – a white Roussane

Lobster: Red or White – a Chardonnay, a rose, or a Pinot Noir, depending personal taste

Oysters: Best with a white wine – Chablis, Muscadet, or a Sparkling White

Salmon: Red or White – Pinot Noir, A Burgundy, or a Chardonnay

Tilapia: Red or White – Red Burgundy, Chianti Classico, or a White Roussane

Please do not be bashful about bringing a Sparkling Wine to the Backyard Bash. This is a very nice touch indeed. It can be a sparkling red or white or a Prosecco. One sparkling wine that I would like to recommend is Mumm Napa Cuvee. This is a red sparkling wine made from Pinot Noir and a very small amount of a Syrah-based liquor. This adds a touch of sweetness to the wine which also carries bright, red fruit flavors that will enliven any summer Barbecue.

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Is our list of meat and fish and the wines to accompany same complete? Not even close, however it is something we can refer to quickly. We live in an area where backyard gatherings are very popular and they can be held for many months of each year. (Better than Boston!) Use the list as a guide and feel free to experiment with menus and wine selections. Your backyard adventure is limited only by your imagination. Have fun!