

We have been enjoying some of the best weather I've ever experienced in South Carolina lately. As a result, my thoughts have turned to backyard grilling, and, of course, summer white wines.

The idea of a backyard gathering has charmed me since the 1980s. It was during that time that I was introduced to this type of entertaining and found that I really enjoyed it. I particularly liked learning about the different types of wine that were appropriate. I started with Chardonnays, experimented with Viognier and Sancerre, and some of the more popular reds. After a season of backyard cookouts, I was convinced that Chardonnay was the clear winner.

And so the winter came, followed by a warm, sunny spring. Another season of backyard entertaining was upon us. Very early that spring my friend Cooper stopped over one evening with two bottles of Sauvignon Blanc. He said we were going to do a taste test. I couldn't think of anything more boring than a tasting of Sauvignon Blanc, but as the saying goes, "anything for a friend." As I was fighting off a yawn, I noticed that Cooper had a notebook in his hand and a serious look on his face. I was about to get a lecture on Sauvignon Blanc.

As it turned out the lecture was quite interesting. Sauvignon Blanc is a dry white wine that owes much of its popularity to the winemakers of the Loire and Bordeaux. The Sauvignon taste is very different from other white wines – like Chardonnay – because of its green and herbaceous flavors. (Here, "green" refers to flavors such as lime, green tea, lemongrass, arugula, and many more). The name Sauvignon Blanc means "Wild White," and the grape is related to the Traminer Family of grapes. Sauvignon Blanc is one of the most widely planted grapes in the world and because of this it has a wide range of styles and flavors. In the OLD WORLD regions, Sauvignon Blanc is plentiful in France, Italy, Spain, and Romania. Moving into the NEW WORLD regions, we find that Sauvignon Blanc is abundant in New Zealand, The US, Chile, South Africa, and Australia. One very important point to remember is that just because it is grown in one country doesn't mean it remains in that country. For instance, Australian products do very well in the US. There is a great deal of importing and exporting.

The primary fruit flavors of Sauvignon Blanc are lime, green apple, passion fruit and white peach. Depending on how ripe the grapes are when the wine is made, the flavor will range from

zesty lime to flowery peach. These flavors reveal themselves as soon as the bottle is opened. What makes Sauvignon Blanc unique among white wines is its other herbaceous flavors like bell pepper, jalapeno, gooseberry, and grass. These flavors come from aromatic compounds called pyrazines and are the secret to Sauvignon Blanc's taste.

Cooper finally got around to the food pairings. Remember we talked about green and herbaceous flavors? Sauvignon Blanc pairs well with similar green herbs. If your recipe has parsley, rosemary, basil, cilantro or mint, chances are Sauvignon Blanc will make a great pairing.

There is also one classic pairing of Sauvignon Blanc that started in the Loire Valley. Close to Sancerre, there is a goat cheese produced called Crottin de Chavignol. It has an international reputation as an outstanding stinky-creamy cheese. A bite of Crottin with a splash of Sauvignon Blanc is considered a classic perfect pairing. My own experience tells me that I was very lucky. I had the good fortune to attend a cooking school in Provence in 2002. One of the classes was at a goat cheese farm. We all took turns processing the goat's milk, and later on forming the cheese into a cake about four ounces in weight. I have been a goat cheese fan ever since.

Just a few more pairings to mention with Sauvignon Blanc. The first is with meat and fish. The list will tell you what a wide variety of meats and fish are a good match with Sauvignon Blanc. White meats including Pork, Chicken, and Turkey are easy to match. Fish would include Sea Bass, Sole, Haddock, Trout, Cod, Redfish, Halibut, Snapper, Mussels, Crab, Lobster, and Clams.

Our second match is with cheese. Look for softer cheeses like Goat's milk, Yogurt, and Creme fraiche.

Our third match is Vegetables. Saute green or mixed vegetables in more fatty vegetarian dishes so that the acidity of the wine comes through. Some examples would be Asparagus quiche, cucumber dill yogurt salad, and white bean casserole with zucchini and white lasagna.

WINESPEAK

My own experience with Sauvignon Blanc is as follows: Since it is an established fact that Sauvignon Blanc is grown all over our planet, it follows that the tastes will be different because of the different soils, different weather patterns, and different vintner techniques. The taste difference will not be drastic, however it will be noticeable. This fact alone should add some fun to your wine shopping while you decide which Sauvignon Blanc is best for you. My choice was Cakebread Cellars Sauvignon Blanc – a little pricey, but good to the last drop. I will keep on shopping to try other brands, but for now I have a standard to use as a comparison.

Summer is coming. Enjoy!