

# Thanksgiving Wines: A Last-Minute Checklist

Suggestions for when you have no time to think (or agonize) about what bottles to buy for the feast.



Serve red and white wines at Thanksgiving, and budget at least one bottle per drinker.  
Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



By Eric Asimov

It's that time again — practically the last minute before the Thanksgiving guests arrive, and you've got everything under control. Except the wine.

Perhaps you planned it that way. Leaving the wine until the very end eliminates the agonizing. You must act, and act swiftly. And we are here to help.

What follows is a last-minute guide to choosing wine for Thanksgiving. We assume you will not have an opportunity to visit a boutique shop. You will have to find the nearest store, possibly the only one still open.

Our suggestions include widely produced brands that may lack some of the distinctive nuances of wines made by hand. But these mass-market selections will have the virtue of being available.

The fundamental rules of shopping for a Thanksgiving feast still apply:

You want both reds and whites, and plenty of both. Unless you are hosting the equivalent of a small dinner party, Thanksgiving is not the place to match specific wines to particular dishes. The culinary terrain is too varied, especially if the plan is for a big meal, with guests who will be bringing many assorted dishes. Indulge their preferences, and figure at least one bottle per drinker.

If you would like to add rosés or sparkling wines, go ahead, but not at the expense of the reds and whites.

You want wines that are versatile enough to go with many different foods and lively enough to refresh over the course of a long afternoon and evening. That means bottles with good acidity, which are not particularly tannic, oaky or heavy in alcohol. I'm looking specifically for wines that are under 14 percent alcohol, a perhaps arbitrary line that makes perfect sense to me.

You want wines that are reasonably priced, around \$25 a bottle at most.

Above all, you want to select wines that you will enjoy. If you are happy, your guests will be happy, too.

Here is a set of suggestions, which you can mix and match anyway you like.

**Crowd pleasers** No wines have better Thanksgiving track records than Beaujolais and sauvignon blanc. They are easygoing, refreshing and pair well with any of the traditional Thanksgiving dishes. Louis Jadot and Joseph Drouhin, both excellent Burgundy négociants, each offer very good Beaujolais-Villages for around \$15 a bottle.

For the sauvignon blanc, I tend to prefer Loire Valley bottles, but many that are widely available may be a bit too pricey. Domaine Reverdy-Ducroux does make a pretty good Sancerre for around \$20. You could also look for bottles from less-expensive Loire appellations like [Quincy](#); Domaine Mardon and Domaine Trotereau are good choices.

You may have better luck with other sources. I would highly recommend the tart and delicious Frog's Leap sauvignon blanc, from Rutherford in the Napa Valley (about \$21). And from the Marlborough region of New Zealand, Huia makes an excellent sauvignon blanc, which sells for around \$20.

**Go American.** Many people like to celebrate this American holiday with American wines. Why not? Montinore, in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, makes a very good pinot noir that's generally available for less than \$20 a bottle. Camp makes an excellent Sonoma cabernet sauvignon (around \$20) that is energetic without being too tannic. It would be terrific if you can find it. Broadside in Paso Robles, Calif., makes a similarly styled cabernet, which sells for around \$16.

Matthiasson, a terrific California producer, makes inexpensive yet delicious blends, in both red and white, under the Tendu label. They could grace any Thanksgiving table. One-liter bottles sell for around \$20.

Dry Finger Lakes rieslings would be great additions. Look for labels like Ravines, Hermann J. Wiemer, Anthony Road, Forge Cellars, Red Newt, Heart & Hands, Silver Thread and Bloomer Creek. Each of their basic cuvées should sell for under \$25.

**Chardonnay** Yes, chardonnay. It is still the most popular white wine in the United States, and some people insist on drinking only that.

Foxglove is the value label from Varner, which makes very good wines in the Santa Cruz Mountains in California. The Foxglove Central Coast chardonnay (around \$15) is rich and ample, yet lively and juicy. A step up is the Russian River chardonnay from Jordan (about \$25) which is focused, energetic and understated.

**I want a pinot noir.** Good, inexpensive pinot noirs are not easy to come by. The grape is tricky to grow, and loses its appeal if not planted in the correct places. We've already mentioned Montinore's pinot noir. Two other Willamette Valley labels to look for, though not as widely available, are Les Brebis and Cooper Mountain. Joseph Drouhin, the Burgundy négociant, makes LaForêt, a more-than-decent bottle of Bourgogne rouge, which sells for about \$15.

From New Zealand, Momo, from Seresin Estate, is quite a good pinot noir for around \$20 a bottle, but not always easy to find. Other good New Zealand pinot noirs tend to be more expensive.

**What about zinfandel?** The dated recommendation to drink this American wine at Thanksgiving has not worn well. Zinfandel, which commonly touches 15 percent alcohol, is generally too powerful. But some exceptions exist. [Broc Cellars](#) Vine Starr is an excellent spicy zin, usually under 13 percent, that would be terrific at Thanksgiving. It's not so easy to find, however, and costs around \$30.

Otherwise, you will need to step over my alcohol line. Ridge, which makes such fine single-vineyard zinfandels, also has an entry-level bottle, Three Valleys, which sells for \$25 to \$30. It's dry, delicious and well-balanced, at 14.3 percent. Dashe, another very good zinfandel producer, offers its fine Dry Creek Valley zin for around \$25 to \$30 as well. It, too, is 14.3 percent.

**What else to look for?** Loire reds like Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny can be excellent. So, too, would be basic Italian reds like barberas from the Piedmont region or sangioveses from the Chianti region in Tuscany, [blaufränkisches](#) from Austria, and mencias, Spanish reds from Bierzo and Ribera Sacra. Among whites, dry chenin blancs from the Loire, and Italian whites like Soave, fianos from Campania and carricantes from Sicily would be great. Take what you can find.

**Do you require a sparkling wine?** Roederer Estate in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino makes an excellent Champagne-style sparkler that is often available for under \$20. Another option would be a good cava from Spain. Gramona and Raventós i Blanc both make very good cavas, which sell for less than \$20. The Raventós i Blanc de Nit is a particularly good rosé cava.

**Other bubbles?** You must mean beer and cider, and why not? Dry ciders hark back to the Thanksgivings of the earliest days of the country, and after many decades of being ignored, good cider is now on the rebound. Worthwhile brands include Foggy Ridge, Farnum Hill and West County. Many areas also have excellent [small-production ciders](#) that are absolutely delicious, but you have to seek them out.

As for beer, I'd opt for lower-alcohol styles that you can drink over the long haul — “sessionable,” in beer parlance, as you can consume a lot without flagging over a long session of drinking. Look for craft brews in the lager, pilsner, amber ale or porter styles.

You have your work cut out for you, now. Don't just stand there — get going!