

Fret-Free Wine Options for Thanksgiving



Tony Cenicola / The New York Times

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Wines of The Times By ERIC ASIMOV

Nothing ought to be simpler than selecting wines for [Thanksgiving](#), right? You pick a few bottles that you like, open them and everybody's happy.

That's the theory, anyway. In practice, the ritual is sometimes fraught with anxiety: Am I picking the wrong wines? Am I picking bad wines? Will it go with cranberry sauce?

Relax. Thanksgiving is going to be great. The food will be wonderful, the company delightful and everybody will love whichever wines you choose.

Here is the truth: Thanksgiving does not depend on which wines you choose. Wine, with rare exceptions, is simply a complementary part of a meal that revolves around gratitude and renewing ties with loved ones. On the beckoning table, it stands with the turkey and sides, not above.

While it's hard to make a wrong decision regarding the wine, you can certainly select wines that will enhance the feast. For years here at the wine panel, the home team — Florence Fabricant and me, along with our colleagues Julia Moskin, Pete Wells and Bernie Kirsch, our tasting coordinator — has gathered to test all sorts of wines with a facsimile of the Thanksgiving meal. Over time we've largely codified the general rules for wines that will go best.

Keep in mind that we are selecting wines for a crowd. We imagine a big, somewhat chaotic meal, with myriad random dishes brought by many guests. For a big group, budget is a factor, so we look at moderately priced bottles, no more than \$25 each. If your Thanksgiving is a sit-down meal for four, well, then, bring out your finest aged wines worthy of the occasion. But if, like us, you're stocking bottles for a boisterous, multigenerational group for whom you've had to borrow chairs and improvise tables, here's what we've learned:

- The best wines are lithe and energetic. They lift you up and refresh, priming the palate for seconds and beyond.
- They are relatively low in alcohol, with ample acidity. Thanksgiving is a long day that often starts early and ends late. The postprandial repose may be a time-honored holiday privilege, but best not to indulge sooner than you want.
- Quantity is crucial. At a holiday of plenty, the worst thing you can do is run out, so don't skimp. Plan a bottle per adult drinker. Extras can be sent with the leftovers (or stashed as you see fit).

The rest is less important. Red? White? Rosé? Sparkling? Any, but at least red and white, and plenty of it. Don't worry about pairing specific dishes with particular wines. The range of flavors is too wide and unpredictable to concern yourself with that. You can pick zinfandel or zibibbo, chardonnay or counoise. Be as mainstream or as esoteric as you wish, as long as the wines fit our general criteria.

As is customary for the Thanksgiving wine panel, we each selected two bottles to bring to the meal. Ostensibly, we were to bring one red and one white, but this directive has been relaxed over time to include sparklers and rosés. In utter defiance, Julia this year brought two whites.

"I was looking for a red, but all the ones I tasted seemed overpowering," she said.

We all have learned the Thanksgiving lessons well. Any of the bottles we chose would make a fine accompaniment to the meal. This was somehow disconcerting to Pete, who was hoping that differing tastes and tenaciously held opinions would converge to produce entertaining squabbles.

"We've all become the same person," he said. Frowns and scowls ensued.

That appalling notion was not entirely true. Though each bottle stood the test, the various wines underscored the huge range of possibilities. The whites and rosés were so good and so closely matched, we gave each three stars.

Julia brought our favorite, a 2011 Effusion from Patrick Baudouin, an Anjou producer who makes wines with minimal intervention. This chenin blanc was racy, rich, minerally and quite delicious. Good [Savennières](#) and [American chenin blancs](#) would make fine alternatives.

Her second white was a fresh, lively Chablis from Patrick Piuze, an excellent young producer. Many other village Chablis would do well, as would whites from the Mâconnais, which, like Chablis, are made of chardonnay.

Pete chose our No. 2 white, a 2013 gewürztraminer from Eminence Road, a very good Finger Lakes producer. It was a bold choice. Gewürztraminer has a singular aroma that can be polarizing: grapefruit, roses and lychee if you like it, cold cream if you don't. It can sometimes be heavy and flaccid. But this wine was lively and delicious; we all loved it.

Florence's white, the 2014 Amycas from Brooks in the Willamette Valley, was made from a blend of grapes that included 15 percent gewürztraminer, along with pinot blanc, riesling, muscat and pinot gris. It seemed to have a little sweetness to it, which can go very well with the panoply of savory flavors. Alternatives may include German kabinetts rieslings or blended whites from Alsace.

Rather than a white, Bernie chose a rosé cava, the de Nit from Raventos i Blanc, an excellent Spanish sparkling wine, reasonably priced at \$23. Cava can be a terrific choice, but it raises the question of whether you want to drink a sparkling wine throughout a big meal. I have reservations; bubbles can be filling. But this would be an excellent aperitif, and it goes well with food. You can always have a few extra bottles if guests would like to continue with it.

I also brought a rosé, a 2014 Matthiasson, one of my favorite California producers, a light, crisp, wonderfully energetic wine. Pete described it as an "Eve Harrington wine," a reference to the "All About Eve" character who initially seems pure and innocent but gradually reveals assertive depths. Rosé is not just a summer wine. A good one will go beautifully with the Thanksgiving meal.

We had a wider range of opinions about the reds. Bernie's, a 2013 Bourgogne Rouge from Domaine Duroché, was our favorite, a vibrant, minerally wine. It's a rare red Burgundy that will fit in our price range. Other options would include good Beaujolais or pinot noirs with good acidity. My choice, the 2013 Lioco Indica from Mendocino, made of carignan, fit the same general taste profile, with spicy, earthy floral and fruit flavors. Sticking with the character references, Julia described it as a "John Gielgud wine, dignified yet spry and racy."

Florence picked a soft, chocolaty Bordeaux, the 2009 Clarendelle from Clarence Dillon Wines, made mostly of merlot, which everybody found highly appealing, though I thought it lacked energy.

That left our final and most esoteric wine, which Pete brought, Fou du Roi from Axel Prüfer, who makes unfiltered natural wines. This red blend was indeed lively, and deliciously earthy, with plenty of residual carbon dioxide that initially left the wine feeling carbonated until it blew off. Like the gewürztraminer, this will be polarizing.

“It’s perfect if you only have wine lovers sitting around the table,” Julia said. With these last two reds, the conventional Bordeaux and the avant-garde Fou du Roi, you have a complete spectrum of what’s possible.

It’s important to keep in mind is that these are not strict bottle recommendations. Instead they represent the sort of wines that will work best. Over the years we’ve found many other good choices: Loire reds, Ribeira Sacras, Etna Rossos, Vouvray, Oregon pinot noirs, California field blends, you name it. Frankly, with all those people coming over, wine is the least of your worries.

WHITES AND ROSÉS

Patrick Baudouin Anjou Blanc Effusion 2011 \$25 Lively, racy and resonant, with intense minerality, aromas of buttered hazelnuts and earthy, nutlike flavors. (A Becky Wasserman Selection/Frederick Wildman & Sons, New York)

Eminence Road Finger Lakes Gewürztraminer Elizabeth’s Vineyard 2013 \$20 Floral, spicy, dry and refreshing, with lightly funky aromas; good depth and presence.

Brooks Willamette Valley Amycas 2014 \$18 Easygoing, fruity and lightly sweet, with a lovely, inviting texture; versatile and refreshing.

Matthiasson California Rosé 2014 \$25 Fresh, floral, clean, crisp, delicate and energetic; who says you can only drink rosé in the summer?

Patrick Piuze Chablis Terroir de Chablis 2014 \$25 Fresh and dry, with lively flavors of citrus, yellow fruits and stony minerality. (David Bowler Wine, New York)

Raventos i Blanc Conca del Riu Anoia de Nit 2012 \$23 Toasty, yeasty aromas, with a lacy texture, delicate bubbles and light, tangy flavor of red berries. (Skurnik Wines, New York)

REDS

½ Domaine Duroché Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2013 \$25 Smooth, vibrant and energetic, with aromas and flavors of flowers, spices and minerals. (Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, N.Y.)

½ Lioco Mendocino County Indica 2013 \$24 Spicy, floral aromas, with flavors of dark fruit, earth and leather, and just a bit of a tannic grip.

Clarence Dillon Wines Bordeaux Clarendelle 2009 \$19 Mellow and soft, with black cherry and chocolate flavors and a lightly herbal component. (Southern Wines and Spirits of America, Miami)

½ Axel Prüfer Le Temps des Cerises Vin de France Fou du Roi 2013 \$21 Rambunctious and unfiltered, with pure aromas and flavors of flowers, earth, plums and tart red fruit. (A Camille Rivière Selection/U.S.A. Wine Imports, New York).

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