

Good Grapes

Wines for the days of summer. BY LANCE SPARKS

Know why foods cooked and/or eaten outdoors taste better? Me neither. But facts is facts, right? Sometimes the simple truth just slaps us upside the head and we adapt or get out of the gene pool.

On the whole, Oregonians are no thicker than most folks, and when Momma Nature gives us sensuous summer days and nights, we rush out of our cribs and suck up sweet air, tuck into grub in the form of picnics and barbecues ... and life is good.

Lately, more Oregonians are becoming so food conscious (I blame TV) they're looking to take their alfresco noshing up a notch or two, beyond bland potato salad and burnt hotdogs. That's a good thing. Some are also ready to abandon sugar-bomb soft drinks and flavorless beer for the complex pleasures of wines. That's a very good thing.

But which wines will match with foods for 'nics or 'Q? Glad you asked.

Start with the food. Think white wines for cold meats, cheeses, poultry, some salads. Rosés are right for meatier menus in sultry times. Save big reds for 'Q in the cool of the evening when grilling some lamb loin on the barbie. Want specifics? Got 'em:

Outdoor Whites

Rieslings offer many virtues — flavors, price and a variety of styles, from sweeter Germans to drier Alsations. Both deliver lovely flavors like ripe pears and peaches, plus these stony-mineral notes, with good acidity for the creamy-cheesy foods and lower alcohol than most wines (stellar virtue if the picnic involves driving). And

they're usually vastly under-priced for the quality. Work the shelves with your local wine pro (ask about Austrian bottlings). Among the Germans (daunting labels, nein?), I trust two names — Prüm and Dr. Loosen — and rarely lose.

These wines tend to be a little sweeter, but this is not Mad Dog/T-Bird schlock-sweet; it's crisp, fresh and refreshing. Alsatian-style Rieslings tend to be drier and more floral in the fruit; reliable (and widely available) names include Trimbach and Zind-Humbrecht. Oregon winemakers produce some lovely Rieslings; locally, find LaVelle or Secret House. Fine outatown producers include Amity and a yummy dry-style from Chehalem.

Gewurztraminer (G-VERTZ-trameener) has all the qualities and charms of Riesling, but with some tropical fruit flavors and spicy notes that just tingle with, for instance, cold Asian salads. And



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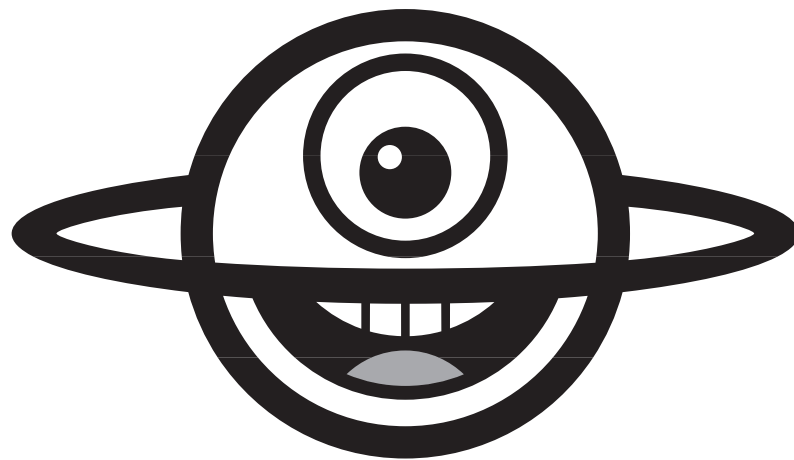
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