

Food & Wine Pairings Made Simple

There is a universal rule that makes matching food and wines a lot simpler than you would think.

Match like styles (complexity, body and flavor) of food with the same types of wine.

The easiest way to do this is to understand grape varietals, then have a lot of fun experimenting! The following wines are listed in descending order of lightest, sweetest and least complex to richer, and more acidic, dense and complicated wines.

	<u>WHITES</u>	<u>REDS</u>
Light:	Chenin Blanc Fume Blanc Pinot Grigio/Gris	Pinot Noir
Medium:	Sauvignon Blanc Riesling Gewurztraminer	Chianti/Sangiovese Merlot Rioja
Complex:	Chardonnay	Red Zinfandel Cabernet Sauvignon Syrah/Shiraz Petite Syrah

So the trick is to pair light bodied wines with light foods with simple flavors.

WHITES:

Chenin Blancs, Fume Blancs, and Pinot Grigio/Gris: white fish with light, white sauces, light appetizers (veggies, cheeses, and sour cream based dips and spreads).

Rieslings & Sauvignon Blancs: heavier, higher fat cheeses, blue cheese varietals, fish and chicken dishes with light herbs.

Chardonnays: chicken and fish dishes with fattier sauces and more pungent herbs.

REDS:

Pinot Noir: This is a very elegant, silky and delicate wine. It goes great with red meat, but only if it is lightly seasoned, or is in a lighter, delicate sauce. It is light enough to be served with darker fish meats like salmon and ahi tuna.

Chianti, Merlot and Riojas: These are great with slightly spicy foods like pizza and with meats that are not too spicy or intense. Rioja is a Spanish wine and is an extremely food friendly wine. A Spanish dish called paella is savory and lightly spicy with seafood and rice. It is a perfect match with Rioja.

Red Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah/Shiraz, and Petite Syrah: Zinfandel is the least complex of these wines. It has a smoky, spicy flavor, so match it with barbecued meats, and some ethnic foods like Latin and South American spices. Cabs and Syrah/Shiraz should be paired with big flavors, sauces and bold herbs. Try Petite Syrah with pepper flavors found in fajitas or with spicy meat dishes.

The same universal rule applies to dining out:

Match like styles (complexity, body and flavor) of food with the same types of wine.

Italian: pair up pizza and pasta with Chianti, saving the heavier wines for meat dishes and spicy sauces.

Chinese: there is an exception in this category. Many spicy Chinese dishes go well with a Riesling. The sweet lightness of the wine offsets the heat of the dish. Sweet and sour dishes often go nicely with a heavy Petite Syrah because the wine brings out the full intensity of citrus sauces with hearty meats.

Mexican: beer and margaritas are the best combination, but don't be afraid to experiment!

Steakhouses: go for the "biggest, baddest" red wine that your budget will allow!

What do you do if everyone at your table has ordered something different, yet you want to order a bottle or two off the menu?

Well, here is one more universal theory: Order a Riesling and a Pinot Noir. These two grape varieties hold up well to most types of food. Riesling holds up well with spicy foods and Pinot Noir does not overpower lighter foods. If all else fails, talk to the sommelier or your food server for suggestions.