

What to pair with turkey?

IT DOESN'T MATTER. ON THANKSGIVING, SKIP PRECISION AND EMBRACE VARIETY

By Michael Austin | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

I knew wine was special long before I ever had my first sip of it.

The stuff had to be special because when I was a kid, it was always served in a carafe — never in its own bottle — and on Thanksgiving, a carafe or two stood among rarely seen china bowls and silver platters on a white tablecloth.

After my first sip of wine, the thing I had known for sure — that wine was special — came into serious question. Only many years later, when I returned to wine as an adult, did I come to appreciate its taste. My initial belief had been right all along — wine was special.

Even on non-holiday nights, when our kitchen table was crowded with plastic tubs of cottage cheese and sour cream, and bottles of ketchup and salad dressing, if there was wine on the table, it was in a carafe. Red or white, the carafe had nothing to do with the traditional reasons for decanting. The carafe was for aesthetics. Why, especially on Thanksgiving, would you want to look at a wine bottle and label — the commercial package that once occupied a supermarket shelf?

My, how things have changed. Now, all these years later, my family displays wine bottles on our Thanksgiving table like they're trophies. You won't see any commercial packaging, even on our table of appetizers, but you'll see wine bottles in many shapes and sizes scattered about as if they're part of an adult Easter egg hunt. We want to see those labels — not to "ooh" and "ahh" at, but to pull information from — especially if we like the wine. Wine is no longer anonymous for us and hasn't been for a long time.

Isn't it a relief to know, despite all of our

wine-pairing precision, that on Thanksgiving, pretty much anything goes? There is simply too much flavor and texture to put your wine choices in a box.

Bring the fruit and acidity, do away with harsh tannins and high alcohol, and whatever you pick will do just fine. Have some dessert wines on hand, and don't skimp on the sparkling wine. It's a celebration. Remember that after the feast (at least according to my experience) there will be lots of random drinking followed by rudderless snacking. Have a good variety of wine on hand for that. Pick American wines on this

American holiday, but also save space for some international selections.

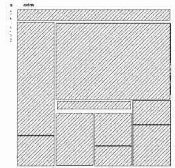
The following are some suggestions that might work for you and your family this year. Serve that cranberry sauce straight out of the can for an ironic twist, or arrange it on a crystal dish in a nod to Rockwellian tradition. Either way, it will look great next to your wine bottles.

Start with some bubbles — on Thanksgiving and as often as you can in your life — perhaps with a biscuity and lime-kissed **2014 Argyle Vintage Brut (\$28)** from Oregon's Willamette Valley, the chalky and lemony **Champagne Vollereaux Blanc de Blancs Brut (\$60)**, the frothy cherry-strawberry **2014 Frank Family Vineyards Brut Rosé (\$55)** from Carneros, or the bright and berry-full **Gerard Bertrand Thomas Jefferson Cuvee Rosé Cremant de Limoux (\$16)** from France. They're all appropriate from the first glass of the day to the last.

For white wines, you could try the **2016**

Chateau La Freynelle Blanc (\$14) from Bordeaux, a blend of sauvignon blanc, semillon, and muscadelle with gooseberry and melon notes, or the **2016 Chealem Three Vineyard Pinot Gris (\$20)** with its Oregonian spiced-apple, cinnamon and honey notes. If you want bright pear, stone fruit and zingy acidity, go with the **2016 Eroica Riesling (\$20)**, a joint project by Washington state's Chateau Ste. Michelle and Germany's Dr. Loosen.

Pink wine is always welcome on Thanksgiving, so try the **2017 J. Lohr Gesture Grenache Rosé (\$22)**, which is brimming with peachy crispness, or go straight



to the **2017 Bonterra Young Red (\$16)** for its bright cherry and floral notes, courtesy of California's Mendocino County. As for reds, the cool-climate **2016 Veramonte Pinot Noir (\$11)** from Chile is full of red licorice and raspberry, while California's **2016 Imagery Pinot Noir (\$20)** sends up black cherry and silky vanilla. For a bigger red, try the **2016 Vietti Tre Vigne Barbera**

D'Asti (\$26), which is full of ripe blackberry, tangy cherry, and spice.

If the official dessert wine of Thanksgiving is not a tawny port, it ought to be. Nuttier and less fruity than a ruby port, or even a young vintage port, tawny port matches well with the autumnal flavors of Thanksgiving sweets. Try the fig-and-caramel goodness of a **Taylor Fladgate Reserve Tawny Port (\$60/1L)**. If that seems pricey for a few sips each of dessert wine, consider that the spe-

cial, antique-style bottle contains a third more wine than a standard bottle, and if you don't finish it on Thanksgiving, it'll last for weeks in the fridge.

The same goes for the rare **2016 In-niskillin Vidal Icewine (\$55/375ml)**, which is from Canada and offers waves of apricot and mango, with a relentless finish. For more chocolaty desserts, or just on its own, try the **2012 Dow's Late Bottled Vintage Port (\$24/750ml)** for its ripe dark fruits and licorice notes. You might consider having a sip of these sweet wines before dessert is served — even while you're still eating dinner. As we have established, this is a day when pretty much anything goes.

Prices may vary depending on market and retailer. Michael Austin is a freelance writer.

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E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE; FOOD STYLING/SHANNON KINSELLA

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