



Serious Eats: A Guide to Wine and Dessert Pairings

Posted by Kara Newman, April 23, 2010



"As the colors of the dessert get darker, the wine gets darker."

I'm still learning my way around wine, but I had more or less stopped cold at dessert, where I tend to switch to coffee. But my friend (and Italian food expert) [Francine Segan](#) informed me that I'm doing it all wrong.

"There are several differences between how Italians serve dessert compared to how we do here in the States," Francine says. "Italians generally linger at the table after a meal, taking time to chat, nibble sweets, and relax. **Desserts are served with dessert wines in Italy, not with coffee or tea.**" (by the way, Francine is also now the "U.S. ambassador" for [Dolce Italia](#), where she is an official "sweets spokesperson," spreading the gospel about Italian desserts. Nice gig, but I digress.)

So how to figure out what wine to pick with dessert? There are three factors to consider: **acidity** (an acidic wine may pair best with a fruit dish, which also has natural acidity), **intensity** (the more intense the flavors of a dessert, the more intense the wine), and **sweetness** (a dessert wine should be sweeter than the dessert itself).

Dessert impresario [Gale Gand](#), of Chicago's [TRU](#) recommends focusing on the different "dessert" categories when selecting wine:

- Custard and vanilla
- Fruit and spice
- Caramels and chocolates

In general, as the colors of the dessert get darker, Gand says the wine gets darker. Here is a guide to wine pairings with each of the major dessert genres:

Custard and Vanilla

Desired Flavors (in the wine and dessert): Mild, light, buttery

Suggested Wine Pairings: **White wines (late-harvest Riesling), sparkling wines like demi-sec champagne, and Asti Spumanti.**



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Caramels and Chocolates



Desired Flavors (in the wine and dessert): Dark, buttery, caramelized, rich.

Suggested Wine Pairings: Red wine (like late-harvest Pinot Noir, Banyuls, Grenache, Australian Shiraz), port (the classic chocolate pairing), and **Grappa**.

Desired Flavors (in the wine and dessert): Versatile.

Suggested Wine Pairings: Port and champagne.

Suggested Wine Pairings: Ice wine. (It's a dessert in itself!). And acidic, crisp white wines.

How do you decide what to pair with dessert? If you serve wine with dessert at all?

About the author: Kara Newman has written about wine and spirits for such publications as *Wine Enthusiast* and *Sommelier Journal* magazines, and is the author of [Spice & Ice](#), which explores 60 tongue-tingling cocktails.

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