

Let Your Red Wines Sparkle This Season



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Travel



Glasses are filled to the brim with Medici Ermete Concerto Lambrusco Reggiano, a local ruby red ... [+] GETTY IMAGES

Temperatures are dropping, days are darker and really, a pop of color and sparkle would add so much to dreary winter drinking. Enter, sparkling reds, an ancient category of wine that's splashing into this century with more sophistication, versatility and intrigue than ever.

To introduce sparkling wine newbies, or sparkling wine lovers in need of a refresher, to the category, attorney and sommelier John M. Jackson (you can see his work at [@AttorneySomm](#)) answered a few questions about the wines. And suggested some (reasonably priced) bottles to make your seasonal really sparkle.

For someone who is new to sparkling reds, what is a sparkling red wine? How is this category defined?

Sparkling red wine is a wine with effervescence like Champagne or Prosecco, but that is red in color because it is made from black grapes which are used to make red wine, and the color from the grape skins is extracted during fermentation. There are a variety of sparkling red wines ranging from extremely sweet and low in alcohol, to very dry and almost 14% alcohol by volume.

What is special and unique about sparkling reds?

Sparkling red wines are unique because of their extreme versatility. They are extraordinarily food-friendly and pair well with everything from breakfast to dessert, and everything in between.

Why are sparkling reds becoming so popular right now?

Although sparkling red wines used to be dismissed as overly sweet and unsophisticated, that has changed. Now, there are a wide variety of quality sparkling wines from different regions, in various styles and at different price points. To avoid the overly sweet wines, look for ABV in the 11-14% range (unless selecting a dessert wine). Further, now that Champagne pricing has been rapidly increasing over the years, sparkling reds represent a great way to reduce cost but enjoy the same festive benefit that accompanies Champagne. For those who have been serving Prosecco in lieu of Champagne, sparkling reds are a great alternative because they pair far more effectively with main courses in addition to working well before dinner or with appetizers.

What do sparkling reds pair well with? What is the best way to serve them?

Like all sparkling wines, sparkling red wines are best served chilled and are extremely food friendly. This is best evidenced by the numerous situations in which sparkling red wines are served. For example, in Australia, Sparkling Shiraz is often served in the morning with breakfast foods like bacon and eggs or strawberry pancakes. Sparkling red wines also work well as a pre-dinner drink or to pair with cheese, charcuterie or other appetizers.

But there is no reason to stop there. With dinner, sparkling red wines pair well with a wide variety of courses. Given the region in which it is produced, it is no surprise that Lambrusco pairs perfectly with pizza (my favorite!), lasagna and other Italian foods. But sparkling red also makes an outstanding accompaniment for pork, chicken, lamb, sausage and other meat dishes. Two of my absolute favorite dinner pairings are sparkling red with duck and cherry sauce and sparkling Shiraz with barbeque. Shiraz often has a smoky, savory component that harmonizes well with smoked meats, but is uplifted by the bright fruit flavors and effervescence in the wine. This is a really great match! Of course sparkling reds would also be an outstanding choice for Thanksgiving dinner – after all, turkey and cranberry is not that much different than duck and cherry.

You can also enjoy sparkling red wine with dessert. Brachetto d'Aqui is an Italian wine from the Piedmont area that typically has some rich floral and fruity notes, is extremely sweet and has only around 5% ABV. Due to its sweetness, Brachetto d'Aqui makes an excellent pairing with desserts that include chocolate or fruit, or better yet – both! For example, chocolate-raspberry cake or Sacher-Torte are great pairing options.

For a sparkling red to pair with dessert, my top selection is the [Giacomo Bologna Braida Brachetto d'Aqui](#) (\$15-\$18). This elegant, sweet wine is incredibly fragrant – imagine a mixed berry explosion in a rose garden! There is vibrant, intense red fruit and a pleasant sweetness that makes this wine the perfect accompaniment to chocolate-covered strawberries or pretty much any dessert with chocolate and fruit, especially red berries.

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