

CONTACT: Jeanine Riedl
312-988-2169
jriedl@webershandwick.com

Wine Party Basics: An Indispensable Guide for Hosts and Hostesses

No matter what you decide about wine themes, menu planning and other party specifics, just follow our simple “Wine Tasting Party Primer” for stress-free tips guaranteed to help you orchestrate a seamless get-together that is as much fun for you as it is for your guests.

PRE-PARTY CHECKLIST

- ✓ ***Glassware.*** Five or six glasses per guest can add up fast – especially when it comes time to do the dishes! So relax and stock up on clear plastic cups instead. That way you'll still be able to appreciate the wines' colors, but cleanup will be a cinch.
- ✓ ***Bottled water.*** Guests will need to quench their thirsts and clear their palates with something other than wine. It's best to serve the water at room temperature, as drinking something very cold can slightly numb the tongue and affect wine tasting.
- ✓ ***Crackers.*** Another must-have for palate cleansing between pairings, make sure to set out plenty of unsalted crackers or plain bread.
- ✓ ***A “pour bucket.”*** In case guests prefer not to swallow every sample of wine they taste, keep some receptacles handy. Don't worry; polite spitting is perfectly acceptable wine tasting etiquette. Use whatever you have on hand – simple bowls, metal Champagne buckets or wide-mouth pitchers will all do the trick.
- ✓ ***Wine openers.*** It may seem obvious, but this is an easy item to overlook. To keep things moving smoothly, you may want to have several openers on hand. While there are endless varieties available, some of the simplest and least expensive models work the best, so just choose whichever type you're most comfortable using.

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- ✓ **Tasting temperatures.** You don't need to be concerned with precise temperatures; just know that for tasting purposes, it's preferable to serve white wines slightly chilled, but not ice cold. Red wines are best sampled at room temperature.

WINE TASTING 1-2-3

Don't get caught up in worrying about rigid procedures and fancy wine lingo. Just concentrate on your own reactions and tasting is as easy as 1, 2, 3.

1. **Look.** Hold the wine up against a white background (a napkin or piece of paper works fine) and notice its color characteristics. The more wines you sample, the more similarities and differences you'll begin to notice.
2. **Smell.** Research indicates that 70 to 75 percent of what we taste is actually due to our sense of smell. Briefly swirl the wine in the glass to release its aromas and then take a whiff. Don't worry about "tasting" the wine yet; just concentrate on what you are smelling and try to describe it.
3. **Taste.** Now take a sip. Pay special attention to your initial reaction, as well as the subsequent reactions you have as the wine moves around your mouth. We each have about 5,000 tastebuds in our mouth, so try to engage as many of them as possible. And make sure to note any lingering flavors in your mouth after you have swallowed the wine, too.

WRAPPING IT UP

The party isn't necessarily over when the last wine pairing has been sampled. Now that everyone has (hopefully) discovered wine and food pairings that they love, encourage guests to go back try their favorites again. And what about leftover wine? Just recork and refrigerate – as with food leftovers, it's best to enjoy them within the next three to five days.

BEWARE OF PARTY CRASHERS

As friendly and agreeable as wine might be, watch out for these top five unwelcome guests, guaranteed to interfere with a great wine tasting:

- ✓ **Perfume.** Since smelling each wine's bouquet is an essential part of the tasting process, it's best to avoid wearing cologne or perfume to tastings. Watch out for strongly scented hair products, too.
- ✓ **Smoking.** Lighting up just before or during a wine tasting will affect your sensitivity to the nuances of the wines. Plus, the lingering odor of tobacco can interfere in other guests' smell and taste sensations.
- ✓ **Toothpaste.** Brushing your teeth right before a tasting is sure to alter the taste of wine. The same goes for gum or mints. Be sure to rinse your mouth well with water before beginning a tasting.
- ✓ **Salt.** It may be used to enhance the flavor of food, but salt has the opposite effect on most wines. Steer clear of highly salted foods during wine tasting.
- ✓ **Extreme temperatures.** Food or drinks that are very hot or very cold both have a temporarily deadening effect on your tastebuds, diminishing your ability to accurately taste the wines.

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The Wine Market Council is an independent, non-profit trade association of grape growers, wine producers, importers, wholesalers, retailers and other organizations affiliated with the wine industry.