



Culinary Institute  
of America

# Pairing Food & Wine



# Learning Objectives

- Describe what wine is and its components.
- Identify and distinguish among the primary wine categories.
- Explain why food and wine pairing is important for chefs.
- Apply the steps of systematic wine tasting to assess wine quality and pairing potential.
- Evaluate how the five basic tastes in food interact with wine characteristics and affect flavor perception.
- Use foundational pairing principles to create successful pairings.
- Define the role of bridge ingredients.
- Select appropriate food pairings for major wine varieties by applying knowledge of each wine's structure, flavor profile, and aromatic characteristics.



# What is Wine?

- Wine is an alcoholic beverage made by fermenting grape juice
- Contains water, alcohol, acids, tannins, sugars, and aromas
- Grape variety, climate, soil, fermentation, and aging shape its flavor and structure
- Styles range from light and crisp to bold and complex
- Wine knowledge helps chefs build better pairings, menus, and dining experiences



# Main Types of Wine

## Red:

- Made from dark-skinned grapes, fermented with skins
- Bold, tannic, complex flavors
- Examples:  
Cabernet  
Sauvignon, Merlot

## Rosé:

- Made from red grapes with brief skin contact
- Light, refreshing, fruity with mild tannins

## White:

- Made from green, yellow grapes, dark grapes without skins
- Crisp, light, or full-bodied
- Examples:  
Chardonnay,  
Sauvignon Blanc

# Main Types of Wine

## **Sparkling:**

- Carbonated wine made via fermentation or CO<sub>2</sub> injection
- Effervescent and celebratory
- Examples: Champagne, Prosecco

## **Dessert:**

- Sweet wines served after meals
- Includes fortified types
- Example: Port, Sauternes

## **Fortified:**

- Wine with added distilled spirit (usually brandy)
- Higher alcohol, can be dry or sweet
- Example: Sherry, Vermouth

# Varietal Wines

- A varietal wine is made primarily from a single grape variety
- Highlights the grape's distinct aroma, flavor, color, and texture
- Varietal labeling provides insight into the wine's style and character
- Most countries require at least 85% of the named grape; 75% in the U.S.
- Understanding varietals supports better wine selection and food pairing



**Cabernet Sauvignon**  
(France, California, Australia, Chile)



**Chardonnay**  
(France, California, Australia)



**Pinot Noir**  
(France, Oregon, NZ)



**Merlot**  
(France, California, Italy)



**Sauvignon Blanc**  
(France, NZ, California)

# Blended Wines

- Blended wine is made by combining two or more grape varieties
- Blending allows winemakers to enhance balance, complexity, structure, and consistency
- Each grape adds unique traits such as body, acidity, aroma, or color
- Blends can be traditional (like Bordeaux or Rhône blends) or modern, depending on the region and style



# Stronger vs. Milder Wines

## **Stronger means:**

- More alcohol
- More tannin
- More astringency and bitterness
- More sour/acidic/crisp/lean/bracing
- Less fruity
- Less sweet
- Less smooth

## **Milder means:**

- Less alcohol
- Less tannin
- Less astringent and bitter
- Less sour/acidic/crisp/lean/bracing
- More fruity
- More sweet
- More smooth

# Tasting and Appreciating Wine

## Step 1.

### **Observe:**

look at the wine's color, clarity, and legs to assess style and age

## Step 2.

### **Smell:**

swirl and smell to identify fruit, spice, or earthy aromas

## Step 3.

### **Taste:**

sip and evaluate flavor, acidity, tannins, and mouthfeel

## Step 4.

### **Reflect:**

think about how it would pair with different foods

## Step 5.

### **Enjoy:**

share thoughts, compare notes, and grow your tasting skills

# Why Pair Wine and Food?

- **Enhancement:** wine boosts flavors and textures in both food and drink
- **Balance:** well-matched pairings prevent one from overpowering the other
- **Uniqueness:** draws out aromas, freshness, or tame bold flavors
- **Tradition:** part of culinary culture and elevate social moments
- **Exploration:** guidelines exist, but trust your palate



# The Science & Art Behind Pairing

## Science

- Understand how the five basic tastes interact
- Match wine and food structure and balance chemical effects
- Body, acidity, fat, tannin, sweetness etc.

## Wine Pairing

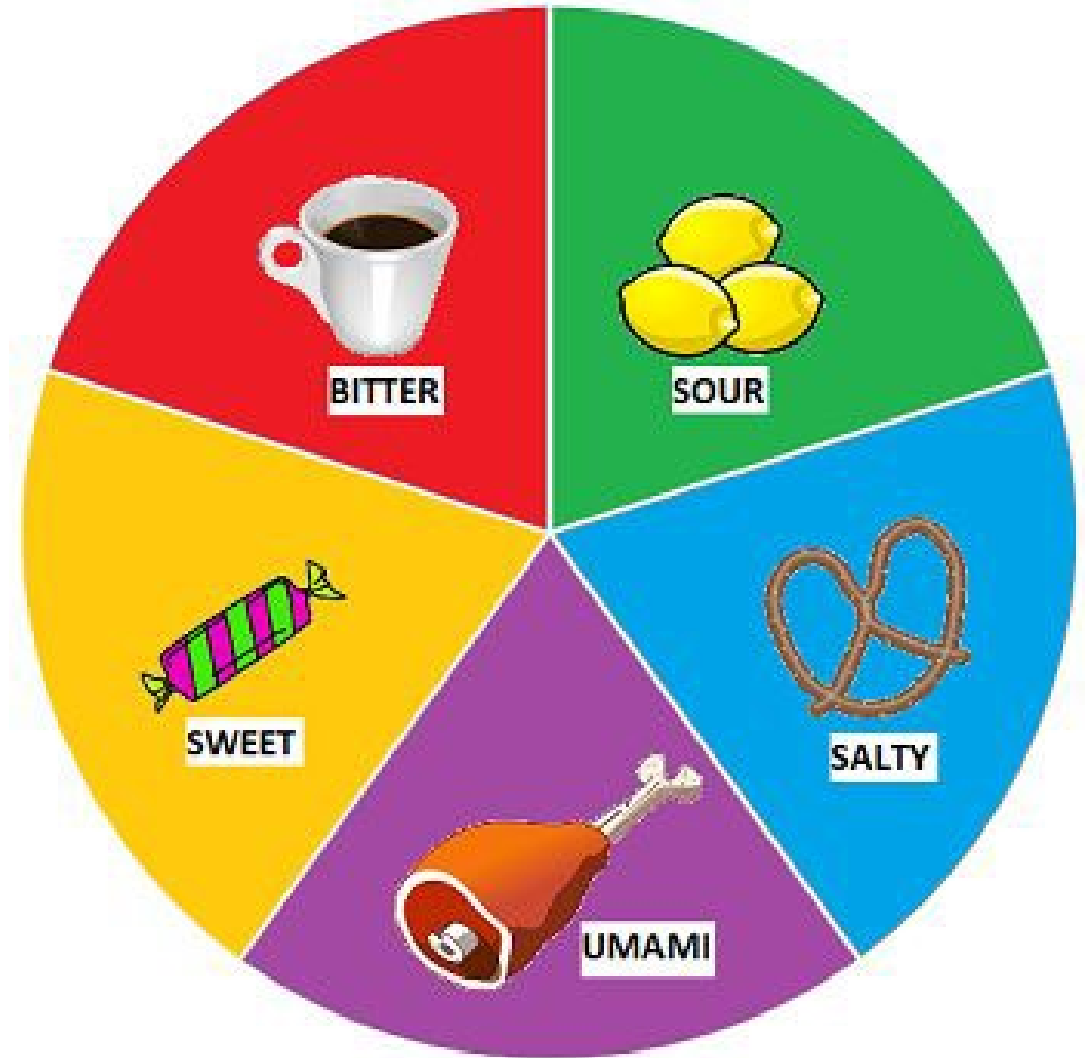
## Art

- Use intuition and creativity: rules are guides, not laws
- Consider mood, setting, culture, and personal taste
- Trust your palate: what tastes good to you is a good pairing

# Components of Taste

Each basic taste in food can change how the taste of wine is perceived:

- Sweetness
- Acidity (Sourness)
- Bitterness
- Saltiness
- Umami



# Sweetness

- Sweet foods reduce the perceived sweetness in wine
- This can make the wine seem drier, more bitter, and more astringent
- Sweet dishes can intensify the wine's acidity and tannins
- To avoid imbalance, the wine should generally be sweeter than the food
- Personal preference plays a major role: some enjoy contrast, others prefer harmony



# Acidity (Sourness)

- Acidic foods reduce the perception of acidity and bitterness in wine
- Makes it taste smoother and richer
- Sweet and sour elements in a dish can balance each other and affect how wine is perceived
- High-acid wines pair best with equally acidic foods to avoid the wine tasting flat
- White wines are usually more acidic and pair well with bright, fresh dishes



# Bitterness

- Bitter foods increase the perception of bitterness in wine, especially in high-tannin reds
- Umami-rich ingredients can also intensify bitterness and create metallic notes
- Salt and acidity in food help reduce bitterness and improve balance in the pairing



# Saltiness

- Salt enhances the flavor of wine
- Reduces bitterness and acidity
- It can counteract umami's negative effects on wine, like heightened bitterness or metallic notes
- Proper seasoning helps create better balance and harmony in pairings



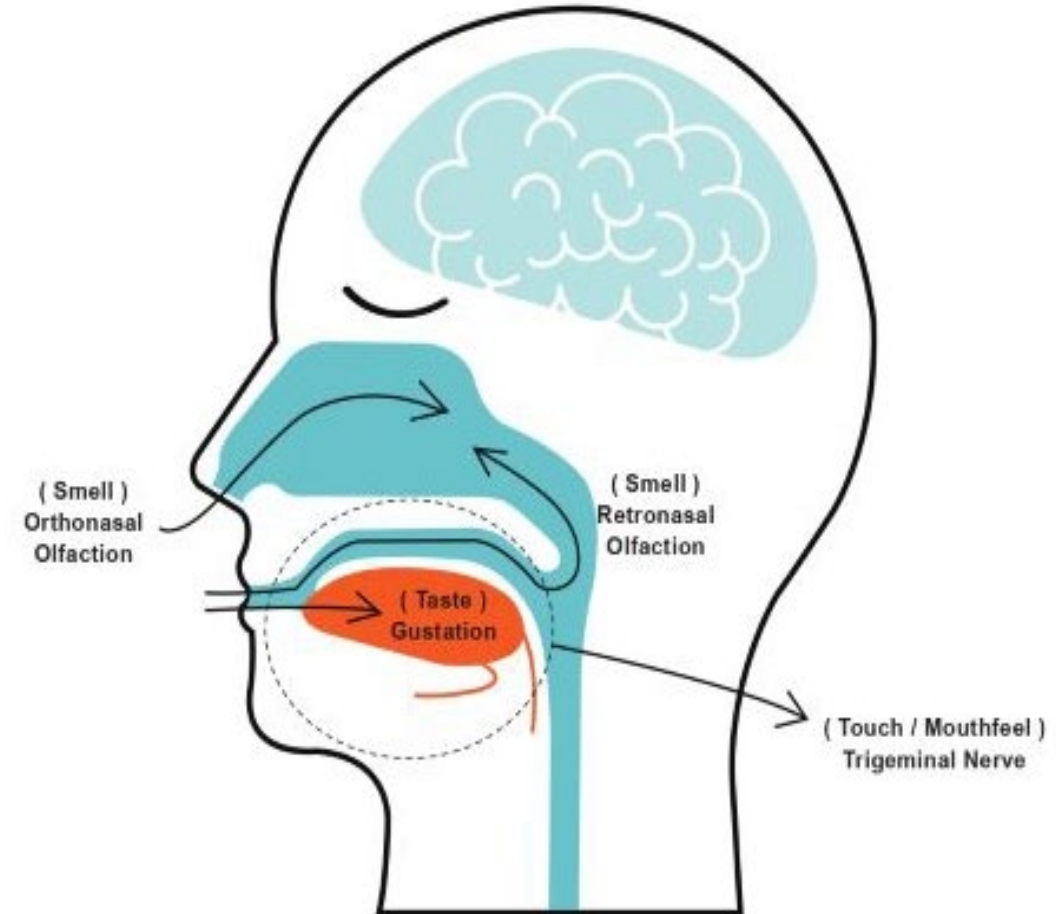
# Umami

- Can make wine taste more bitter, astringent, or metallic, especially in young, tannic reds
- Adding salt or fat to umami-rich dishes helps reduce these negative effects and improves balance
- Wines with low tannins or some bottle age pair better with high-umami foods



# Components of Flavor

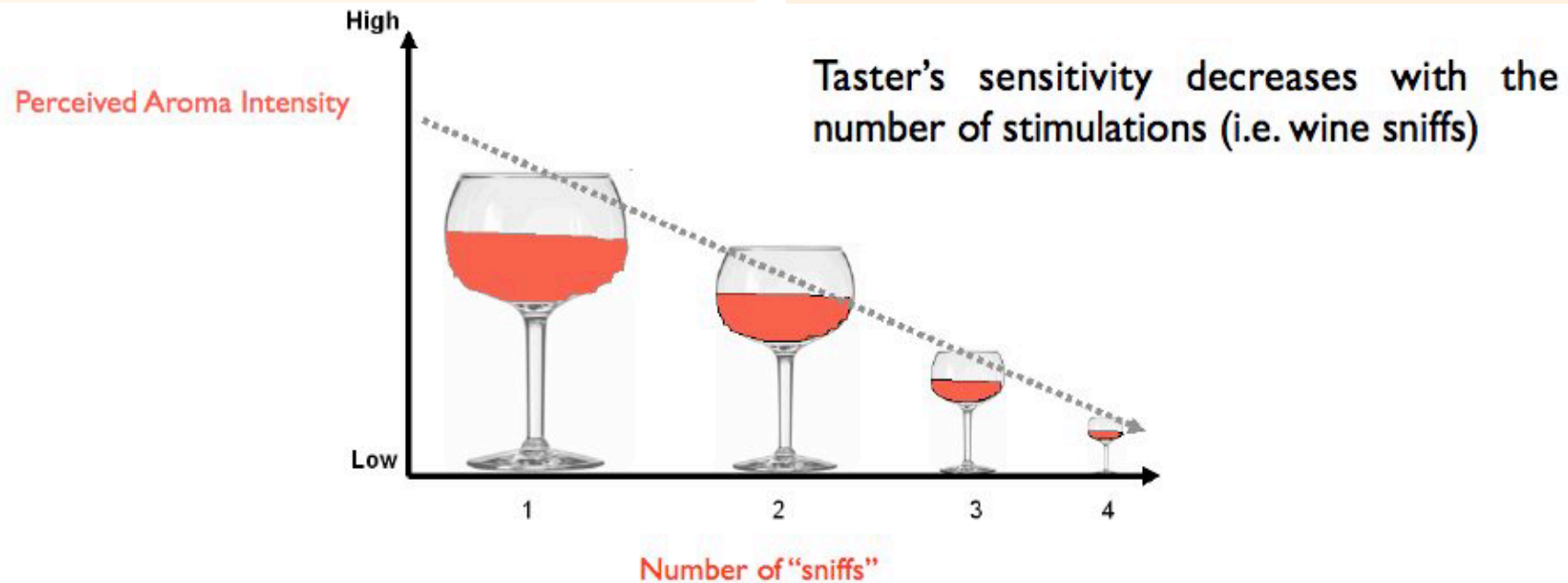
- Flavor = Taste + Aroma + Mouthfeel
- Aroma comes from both food and wine, adding complexity and depth
- Mouthfeel includes sensations like astringency, creaminess, or effervescence
- Flavor perception is subjective: shaped by individual experience, culture, context
- Successful pairings balance and enhance these components for a memorable tasting experience



# Sensory Adaptation

- Your palate becomes less sensitive after repeated exposure to stimuli like acidity, tannin, or alcohol
- This can dull flavor perception during long meals or tastings

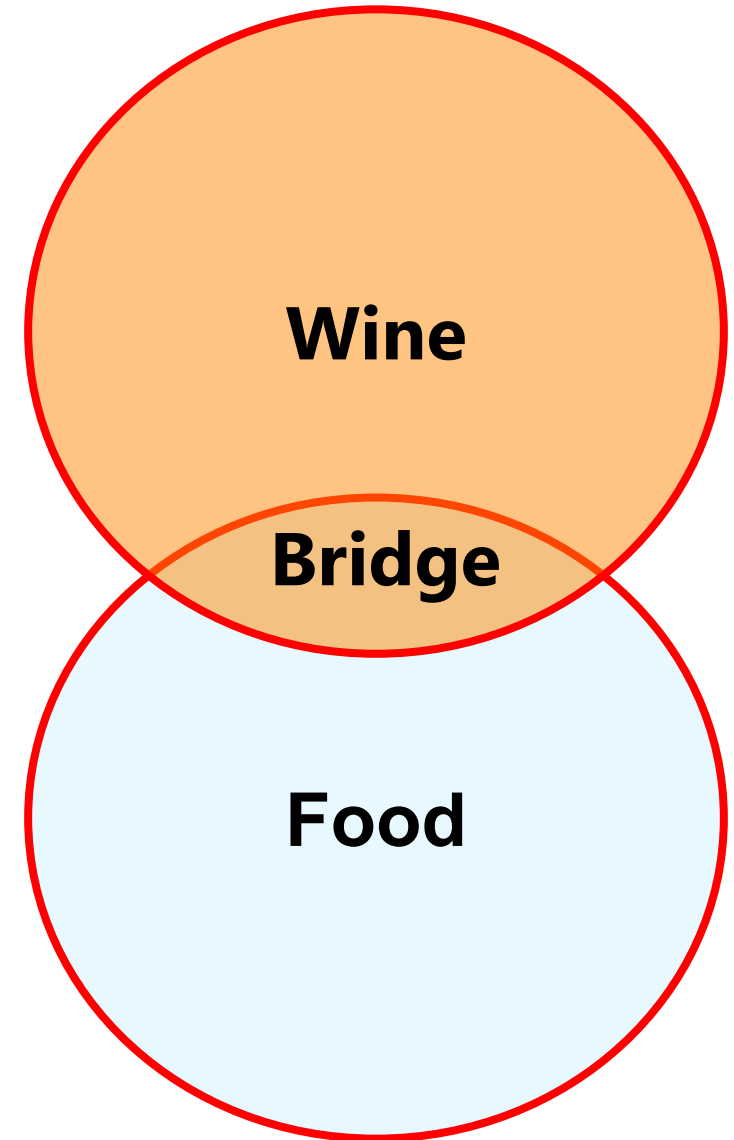
- Fatigue, stress, and dry mouth can increase sensitivity to tannins and affect how wine tastes
- Take breaks and cleanse the palate to help keep your senses sharp



Adapted from (Sekuler, 2002)

# Bridge Ingredients

- Flavors or components that appear in both the food and the wine, helping to create a smooth, harmonious connection between the two
- They “bridge the gap” by highlighting shared characteristics, making pairings feel more natural and cohesive
- Enhances pairing success, especially when food and wine seem otherwise mismatched



# Tasting Wine

## Step 1.

### **Flavor profile:**

identify key traits in the wine to guide pairing

## Step 2.

### **Weight & intensity:**

match wine body with food richness for balance

## Step 3.

### **Match or contrast:**

pair with foods that reflect or offset the wine's flavors

## Step 4.

### **Cooking method:**

factor in how cooking style affects flavor and texture

## Step 5.

### **Bridge ingredients:**

use shared elements to connect wine and dish

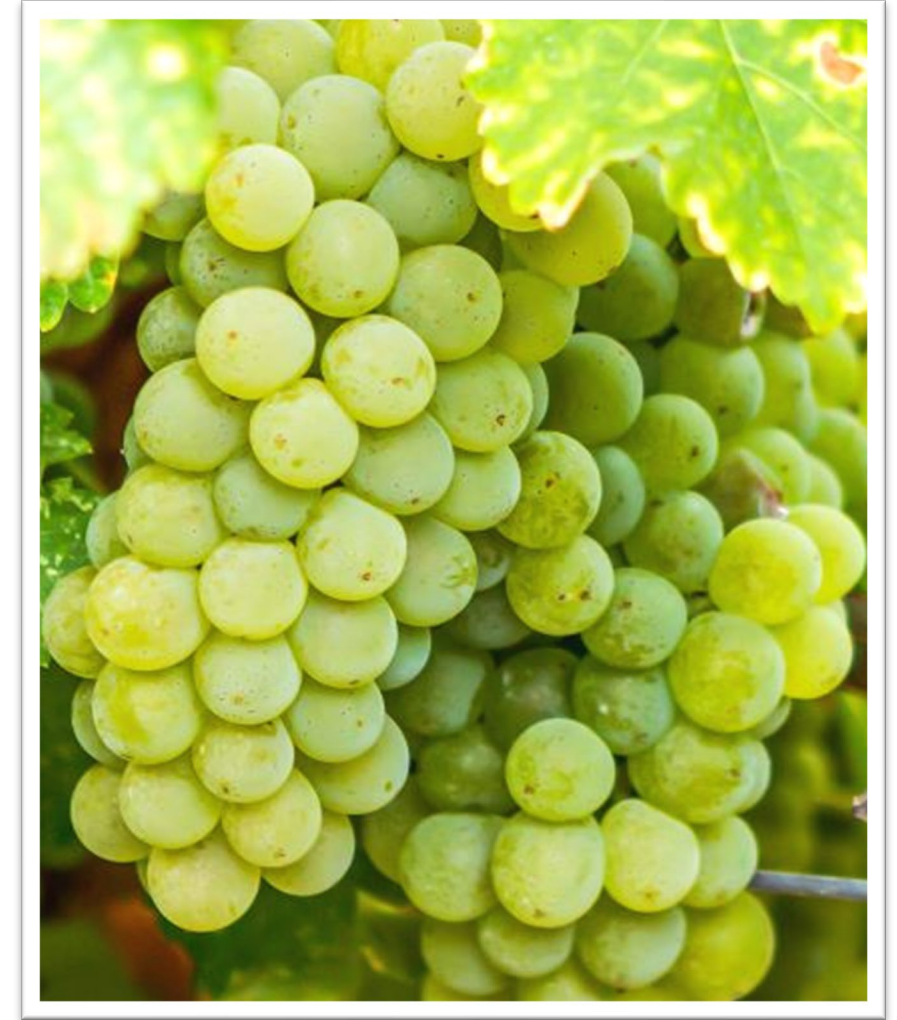
## Step 6.

### **Seasoning effects:**

know how salt, acid, and spice affect wine balance

# Sauvignon Blanc

- A green-skinned grape variety known for producing crisp, aromatic white wines
- **Style range:** crisp and grassy to fuller and lightly spiced, depending on winemaking
- **Blending:** sometimes with Sémillon for softness
- **Winemaking:** made in stainless steel for freshness or oak for richness
- **Structure:** dry, aromatic, medium-bodied, high acidity, and usually 12–13% alcohol
- **Fumé Blanc:** oak-aged Sauvignon Blanc, offering a rounder, smoky style



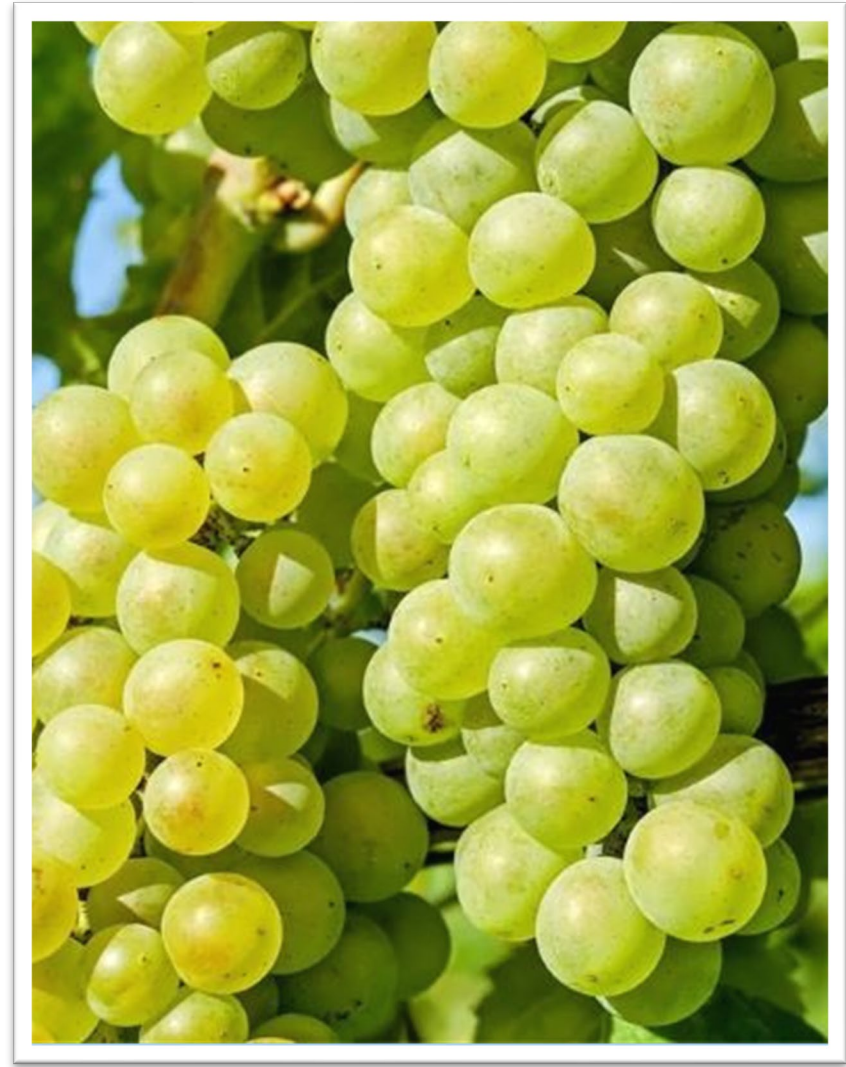
# Flavors & Pairings

- **Flavors:** melon, pear, fig, citrus, tropical fruit, grassy, herbs, gooseberry
- **Best with:** shellfish, white fish, chicken, turkey
- **Bridge ingredients:** citrus, fresh herbs, goat cheese, bell peppers, tomato, capers, olives
- **Best regions:** California, Washington, Loire (France), New Zealand, Chile, South Africa
- **Pairing tips:** great with aromatic, high-acid, and spicy foods



# Chardonnay

- Most popular white grape globally, grown in nearly every wine region
- **Style range:** from crisp and mineral (Chablis) to rich, buttery, and oaky (California); heavily on climate and winemaking choices
- **Blending:** single-varietal wine
- **Winemaking:** fermented or aged in oak for body, creaminess, and spice; stainless steel preserves freshness
- **Structure:** medium to full-bodied, moderate acidity, often higher alcohol (13–14.5%)



# Flavors & Pairings

- **Flavors:** green apple, pear, peach, melon, citrus, tropical fruit, toast, butter, vanilla, honey, nuts
- **Best with:** shellfish, white fish, chicken, veal, pork, turkey
- **Bridge ingredients:** citrus, apples, corn, avocado, coconut, herbs, spices, nuts, butter, cream, mushrooms, cheeses
- **Best regions:** California, New York, Burgundy (France), Australia, New Zealand, Chile, South Africa
- **Pairing tips:** rich dishes highlight body, avoid spicy dishes



# Pinot Noir

- A thin-skinned red grape known for elegance, subtlety, and complexity
- **Style range:** light to medium-bodied, from bright and fruity to earthy and savory with age
- **Blending:** single-varietal wine
- **Winemaking:** often aged in oak to add depth and spice; minimal intervention highlights terroir
- **Structure:** light tannins, high acidity, and moderate alcohol (12–14%); smooth texture with layered aromatics



# Flavors & Pairings

- **Flavors:** cherry, raspberry, cranberry, mushroom, earth, smoke, spice, floral
- **Best with:** beef, lamb, pork, veal, duck, chicken, salmon, tuna
- **Bridge ingredients:** berries, mushrooms, shallots, cheese, eggplant, beets, herbs, roasted tomato
- **Best regions:** Burgundy (France), California, Oregon
- **Pairing tips:** flexible, avoid overpowering dishes



# Cabernet Sauvignon

- A small, thick-skinned red grape known for bold flavors, firm tannins, and aging potential
- **Style range:** full-bodied and concentrated, from fruit-forward to complex and earthy with age
- **Blending:** often with Merlot, Cabernet Franc
- **Winemaking:** aged in oak for texture and notes of spice, vanilla, or cedar
- **Structure:** high tannins, moderate to high acidity, and higher alcohol (13.5–15%); built for richness, depth, longevity



# Flavors & Pairings

- **Flavors:** black currant, cherry, vanilla, mint, cedar, tobacco, chocolate
- **Best with:** beef, lamb, pork, veal, venison, duck
- **Bridge ingredients:** currants, nuts, mushrooms, Dijon, olives, cheeses, herbs, roasted tomato
- **Best regions:** Bordeaux, California, Washington, Australia, Chile, Italy
- **Pairing tips:** best with fatty meats/nuts, avoid seafood and very spicy dishes





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Any Questions?