

The Challenge of Wine Pairing with Chili



There's no time of year that isn't good for a delicious chili recipe. Chili is a staple at barbecues and around campfires in the summer, serves as a warming comfort food during the cooler months, and previews a taste of what's to come when the snows thaw and the weather begins to warm again. Chili is also a fantastic source of protein and can be modified to fit nearly any palate.

Being such a dynamic meal, it's natural that wine connoisseurs would want to get the most out of it with a food and wine pairing that surprises and delights. However, it being a generally spicy meal, wine pairing with chili can be challenging. Challenging, but not impossible.

Wine Pairing with Chili: A Few Things to Consider

As with any wine pairing, the taste is in the palate of the beholder. Of course, there is a consensus that aficionados have agreed upon, but ultimately it's your experience, so [consider what you want](#) and go from there.

Here are a few things to consider when wine pairing with chili:

- Chili is generally spicy and meaty, so a bold, full-bodied red wine high in alcohol is [likely to enhance this flavor](#).
- There are [many different styles of chili](#), and their spice level varies, so different chilis will need different wine pairings.
- Sweet, crisp white wines may seem strange for such a hearty dish, but the sweetness will cut through the spice and provide a refreshing contrast to the spice.
- When it comes to tannins, make sure they match your meat. No matter the varietal, a rich wine will likely be best.

- Sparkling and [rosé wines](#) are not automatically out of the mix, especially with chilis that don't involve beef.
- Consider being a bit more modest with the spice in your chili. If your goal is to enjoy a glass of wine with your chili, too much spice can overwhelm any wine.
- Play! Everyone has an opinion when it comes to the rules of food and wine pairing, but what matters, in the end, is that you enjoy what you're eating and drinking.

Chili and Wine Pairings That Work

Hearty Beef Chili and New World Reds

When you think of chili, you likely think of the classic American combination of kidney beans, onions, ground beef, and the perfect amount of spice. Chili is a new world concoction, so it stands to reason that a [new world red wine](#) will pair nicely with it.

Bold Malbecs from Argentina can take your tastebuds on a spicy ride that will leave your mouth tingling with excitement. More mild yet tannic wines from France and Italy will match well with the beef without overwhelming your senses. And full-bodied, fruit-forward wine from California will offer you enough sweetness to balance out the spice in beef chili and provide a nice contrast with each bite that will leave your palate feeling completely fulfilled.

Pork Chili and Riesling

If you're looking at a pork chili that is light on — or omits — tomatoes, then a dry white wine may be exactly what you're looking for. A pork chili will likely have a mild spice flavor, so a lighter wine will serve nicely. In Alsace, [the French often pair local Rieslings](#) with pork platters, and the same match can be applied here.

However, if you're looking at a spicier pork chili, then pulling back on the dryness just a bit is recommended. A chili verde with pork pairs well with an off-dry Riesling. [Germany's Rieslings](#) are some of the best that you can find to make this pairing ideal.

Vegetarian Chili and Rosé

If you're looking for a lighter summer chili that won't make you sweat in the sun, then a [bean and tomato chili](#) will likely satisfy your craving. The fresh summer veggies combined with hearty beans and just a hint of spice will mix nicely with a semi-sweet rosé. The crisp flavor of the rosé will keep you cool and refreshed, balancing out the mild spice without taking it away. Even a sparkling rosé can add a little zest to each bite, like a freshly chopped herb.

White Bean Chili and Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay

Though both Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc can be used — to great success at times — to cut through the spice of a stronger, more hearty chili, their true power lies in complimenting a lighter chili.

A white bean chili — [especially one with chicken](#) or turkey — will likely feature aromatic herbs such as cilantro and oregano. Additionally, a white bean chili is enhanced with avocado and a slight flavor of black pepper. This combination lends itself well to the minerality of many Sauvignon Blancs. Additionally, white bean chilis with white meat poultry tend to have a creamier texture that matches well with a Buttery Chardonnay.

Spicy Chili and Zinfandel

If you're going to eat a chili that rivals the spice of a raw ghost chili pepper, then there isn't a wine in the world that won't be overwhelmed by the spicy. However, if you really need a spicy wine and chili combination, a jammy Zinfandel is your best bet.

The [bold fruit flavors of a hearty Zinfandel](#) are least likely to be overwhelmed by a spicy chili. You can chill your Zinfandel to really make those jammy flavors pop and cool your palate in between fiery bites. Also, since Zinfandel's have a higher alcohol content — which is likely to enhance the spicy flavor — chilling your wine will help cool the alcohol intensity.

Preparing Your Food and Wine Pairing

Regardless of the type of chili you're preparing for your guests or yourself, you'll need an [excellent selection of wines](#) to choose from in order to find your ideal combination. JJ Buckley Wines offers a wide variety of fine wines from around the world that will excite your wine food pairing experience.

We also offer [consulting services](#) for aficionados looking for guidance in finding the perfect wine selection for any occasion. Find your ideal flavor with JJ Buckley Fine Wines.