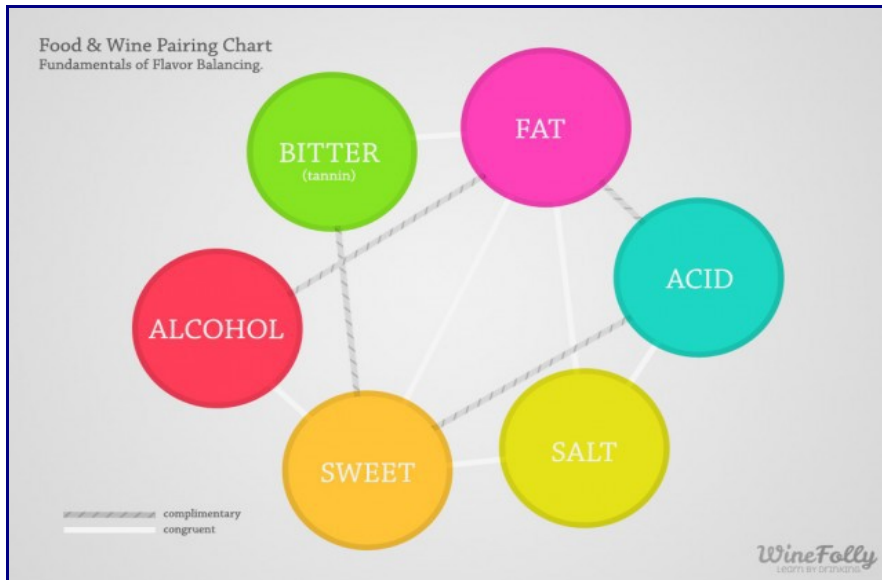


Basics to Food and Wine Pairing

Turns out there are the main basic flavor profiles that you can experiment with to develop a great food and wine pairing. Here we take a look at the fundamental flavor profiles for food and wine pairing as well as the regional pairing example and why it works. Learn to match food and wine like a professional chef or sommelier.



Bitter, fat, acid, salt, sweetness and alcohol balance together to make a perfect pairing.

The 6 Basics to Food and Wine Pairing.

I was half asleep in the morning in my Restaurant until Chef Mike boomed in his signature snide-but-charismatic voice,

“Cooking is simply a balance of fat, acid, salt and sweet.”

At the time, I was not a glorious writer of hedonism (aka wine), but part of the service staff gleaning knowledge on how to sell food. What Mina touched on struck a chord and helped me to isolate what I need to go about constructing a food and wine pairing. The basics of flavor-matching are actually quite simple (although not always easy to pull off). These are the 6 basic profiles to work with when thinking about matching food and wine:

1. **Acidity** in wine pairs well with fatty and sweet foods.
2. **Fatty** foods need either an acidic or high alcohol wine, otherwise the wine will taste flabby.
3. **Bitter (aka Tannic)** wine can be balanced with a sweet food.
4. **Salty** shouldn't compete with acidity in wine. Use sparingly as necessary to keep sharpness in the meal.
5. **Sweet** food/wine benefits from a little acidity.
6. **Alcohol** can be used to cut through fatty foods or balance a sweet dish.

[Check Out The Champagne Pairing Post](#) See wine pairings in action ->



A regional match is almost always your best match for food and wine pairing

Common Food and Wine Pairing Techniques

Regional Pairing

The idea of a regional pairing is pretty fundamental. Imagine Italian wine and Italian food or an Oregon pinot noir with a cow's-milk cheese from the Willamette Valley. Regional matches aren't always the perfect pairing, however they provide a template for us to understand more about what's going on structurally with wine & food pairings.

Acid + Acid

Unlike bitter, acidity can be added together with food and wine and will create the basis of what wine people think about when selecting a wine with dinner. If the wine has less acidity than the food, the wine will taste flat. An easy visualization for acids out-of-balance is a glass of **oaked warm climate chardonnay** with a vinaigrette salad. When pairing a dish with wine, consider the acid balance between the food and the wine.

Sweet + Salty

If you love maple bacon, candied pecans and salted caramels, a wine and food pairing of a sweet wine with a salty food will probably delight you. Pair riesling with asian foods such as fried rice or Pad Thai, or try one of my favorite "low calorie" desserts of pretzels and tawny port.

Bitter + Bitter = No

Bitter does not go well with more bitter, which is the primary reason why I loath red wine and chocolate pairings. When we feel fat in the middle of our tongues, it helps to alleviate bitterness.

Bitter + Fat

Grab a big thick piece of fatty *something-or-other* and pair it with a wine with lots of tannin. This is the classic steak with red wine food pairing, however, I think we can do better than that. Take a red wine such as an Italian Sangiovese with lots of cherry flavors and pair the wine with an herbed potato croquette, roasted red tomatoes and rocket (a classic *Tuscan Secondi*). Suddenly you have a dish that has the tannin balanced with the fat in the croquette and a congruent flavor in the dish and wine (tomato and cherry) that elevate each other. *I'm already drooling.*

Acid + Fat

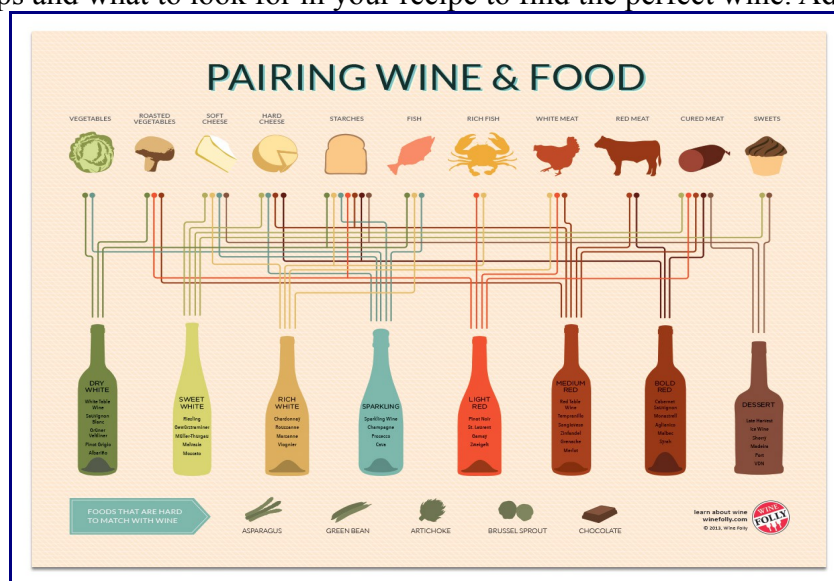
Nothing like a glass of champagne to cut the fat. A high acid drink will add a range of interesting flavors to a lipid heavy dish. This is why white wine butter sauce is popular (you can watch a video of how to Make Buerre Blanc if you'd like) The white wine in the butter sauce livens up the whole dish. So when you are in a situation where there is something fatty like cheese cake, get a glass of something bubbly and zippy.

Alcohol + Fat

The alcohol category is a bit of a strange one. The alcohol taste actually comes across as acidity so a lot of the same ideologies of the Acid + Fat category pass over into Alcohol + Fat. The primary difference is that a high alcohol drink should not be used as a palate-cleanser because that will eff you up. Instead, look at an alcohol + fat category as a way to mitigate high-speed food consumption. A glass of 17% ABV zinfandel will greatly slow down the rate at which you consume your pepper steak. I use the alcohol + fat category often for dessert pairing, but I'd like to see it more in dining as we learn to eat slower and enjoy *longer*.

Food and Wine Pairing Basics (Start Here!)

Learn the fundamentals behind food and wine pairing to create your own great pairings. This guide will show you the steps and what to look for in your recipe to find the perfect wine. Additional tips

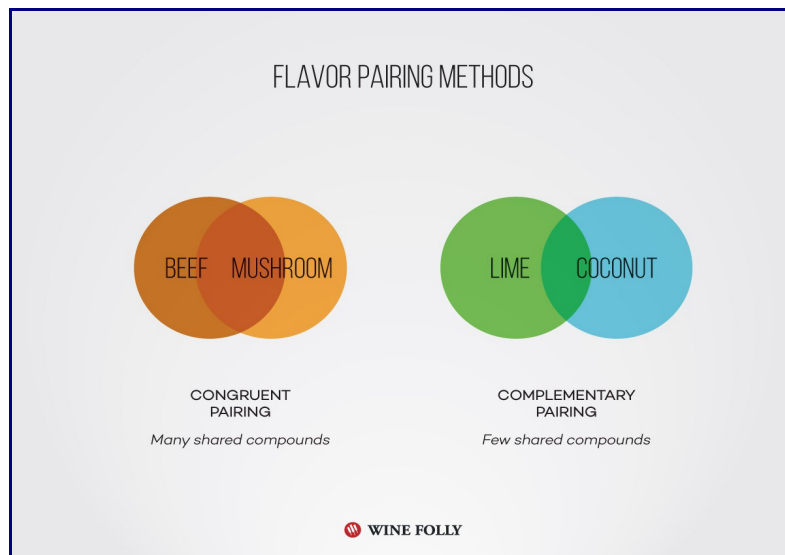


are below!

A great food and wine pairing creates a balance between the components of a dish and the characteristics of a wine. As much as it seems complex, it's actually pretty easy to make great pairings.

The steps to pairing food with wine

1. Know the “rules” of wine pairing (see below)
2. Identify the basic tastes in food and wine
3. Assess the intensity of the dish to find an equally intense wine
4. Choose a basic taste strategy (e.g. sweet + salty, fat + acid, sweet + sour, etc)
5. Play with subtle congruent or complementary flavor pairings to find a potential match



What is Congruent and Complementary Pairing?

A complementary pairing creates balance by contrasting tastes and flavors.

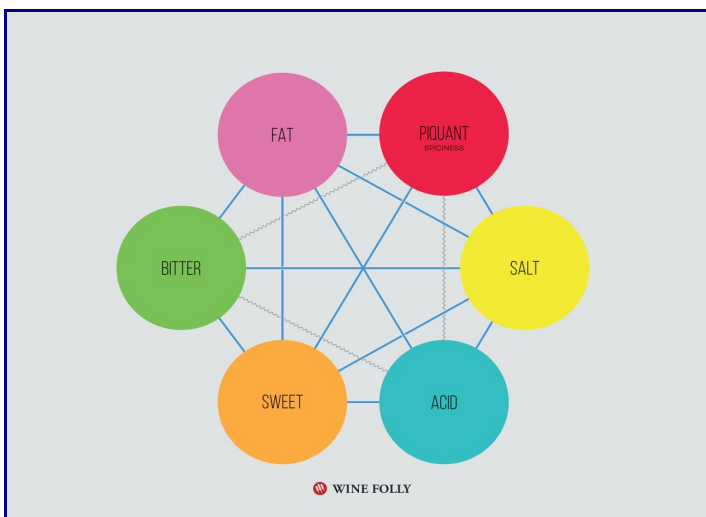
A congruent pairing creates balance by amplifying shared flavor compounds.

9 Tips For Pairing Wine & Food

If you're just getting started, you'll find these tried-and-true methodologies to produce consistently great pairings. That said, as you get more familiar with different wines, you'll become confident and can experiment breaking the rules! ([Gamay](#) with [trout](#) anyone?)

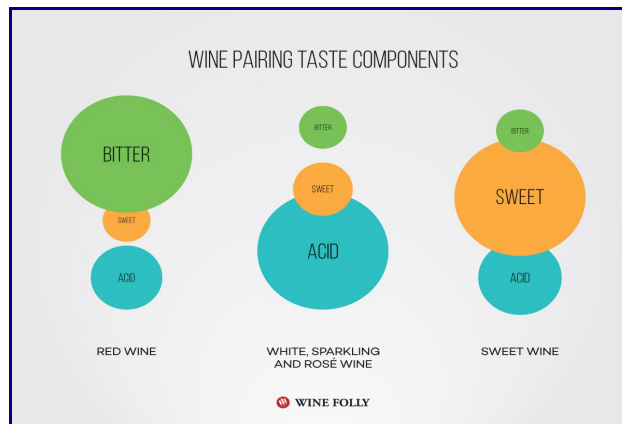
1. The wine should be more acidic than the food.
2. The wine should be sweeter than the food.
3. The wine should have the same flavor intensity as the food.
4. Red wines pair best with bold flavored meats (e.g. red meat).
5. White wines pair best with light-intensity meats (e.g. fish or chicken).
6. Bitter wines (e.g. red wines) are best balanced with fat.
7. It is better to match the wine with the sauce than with the meat.
8. More often than not, White, Sparkling and Rosé wines create complementary pairings.
9. More often than not, Red wines will create congruent pairings.

Identify The Basics Tastes



In this day and age, we've learned that there are over 20 different tastes found in food – from the basic, including sweet, sour and fat, to the extreme, including spicy, umami and electric. Fortunately you only need to focus on 6 tastes when pairing food and wine: Salt, Acid, Sweet, Bitter, Fat and Spice (Piquant).

Basic Taste Components in Wine



For the most part, wine lacks the 3 tastes of fatness, spiciness and saltiness but does contain acidity, sweetness and bitterness in varying degrees. Generally speaking, you can group wines into 3 different categories:

1. Red wines have more bitterness.
2. White, rosé and sparkling wines have more acidity.
3. Sweet wines have more sweetness.

Basic Taste Components in Food

Simplify a dish down to its basic dominant tastes. For example, baked macaroni has 2 primary components: fat and salt. Southern barbecue is a bit more complex and includes fat, salt, sweet and spice (plus a little acid!). Even dishes without meat can be simplified. For example, a green salad offers acidity and bitterness; creamed corn offers fatness and sweetness.

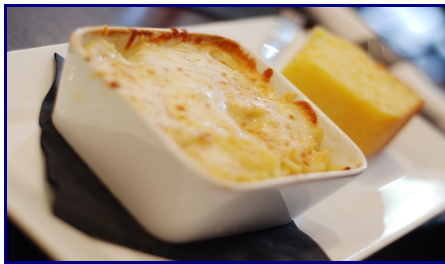
Consider the intensity

FOOD: Is the food super light or super rich? A salad may seem lighter, but perhaps the dressing is balsamic vinaigrette with high acidity. If the intensity of the dish isn't obvious at first, just focus on the power of each taste component (acidity, fat, sweet, etc).

WINE: Is the wine light or bold? Here are a few examples:

- Sauvignon Blanc is light-bodied, but it has higher acidity
- Chardonnay has more body, but it's usually not too acidic
- Pinot Noir is lighter bodied (for a red wine) and it doesn't have too much tannin (bitterness).
- Cabernet Sauvignon is more full-bodied and has high tannin (more bitterness)

Finding Complementary or Congruent Pairings



Now that you've identified all the basic taste components in your dish, you can start playing around with pairing options. The simple example of the baked macaroni will offer up several possible pairings:

COMPLEMENTARY PAIRING: A white wine with high acidity will complement the fat in the macaroni. So, for example, a traditional mac and cheese recipe with a creamy béchamel sauce matched with zesty white wine such as Pinot Grigio, Assyrtiko or Sauvignon Blanc would create a *Complementary Pairing*.

CONGRUENT PAIRING: A white wine with creaminess will add to the creaminess in the dish. So, for example, a traditional mac and cheese recipe with a creamy béchamel sauce matched with a creamy white wine such as Viognier or Chardonnay would create a *Congruent Pairing*.



Getting creative with pairings

Once you create balance with the major taste components in both the wine and the dish, you can get creative by pairing the more subtle flavors. Here are some examples using variants of mac and cheese:

BOLD RED WINE: The ideology behind this pairing is that the high bitterness (tannin) will be balanced out by the salt and fat in the macaroni. This balancing will leave you with the remaining subtle flavors to pair with in the cheese and wine. So, for example, if your baked macaroni has smoked gouda in it, you might choose a Shiraz which also has smokiness in it (on the finish). The smoky flavors combine to create a Congruent Pairing while the tannin in the wine creates a Complementary Pairing with the fat in the dish.

SWEET WHITE WINE: The ideology behind this pairing is to bring out the sweet and salty flavors with a pairing. For example, a mac and cheese with ham would match well with a zesty white wine with some sweetness like Riesling. The acidity would create a Complementary Pairing to the fat and the sweetness would act as a Congruent Pairing to the ham.