

The grape outdoors

The best wines for your barbecue

The right choice of wine can turn your barbecue into a sizzler, even in a downpour. The key thing to think about is the food you'll be serving. All those smoky, chargrilled meats, seafood and vegetables rule out very light wines – they just won't be able to stand up to the rich array of flavours. Instead, you need something that packs a bit of a punch. Fruity, ripe New World Chardonnays and relatively rich, full-bodied reds were the styles that won the (somewhat overcast) day when we asked seven professional tasters to select the best wines for barbecues.

The 23 wines in our test had been nominated by the major supermarkets as suitable for serving with barbecue dishes. We specified two sorts of food: relatively light dishes (chicken with light barbecue sauce, king prawns,

vegetable kebabs and corn on the cob), and richer, red-meat dishes. The wines had to cost less than £10. Our panel tasted the wines 'blind' (the bottles were covered) and in two groups corresponding to the two categories of food.

Our tasters were looking not just for decent-quality wines but also for those which married best with the food. Overall, the wines scored fairly highly but the richer styles, from warm climates such as South Africa, Spain, Southern France and Chile, were praised for their food-matching abilities. Our South African white came top overall and complemented the lighter dishes well. And in the richer-food category our top-scoring red, Marks & Spencer Old Vines Grenache Noir, was one of the cheapest red wines in our selection. Cheers to that.



BEST FOR LIGHTER FOODS

14/20 Verdelegen Chardonnay 2005, S Africa £9.49 (Majestic)

Our overall winner was described as very oaky but with good acidity and depth of fruit. Its richness worked well with the vegetable kebabs and barbecue sauce on the chicken.

13/20 Chilean Chardonnay 2005 £2.81 (Asda)

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE which?

This 'pleasant, creamy' wine drew praise for being 'bright, full and fruity'. Tasters thought it 'really nice with prawns' and that it went well with mushrooms, onions and courgettes.



BEST FOR RICHER FOODS

14/20 Old Vines Grenache Noir 2004, France £5.49 (M&S)

'Smoky, sweet fruit' was how one taster described our top-scoring red, while another summed up its appeal as follows: 'Simple, direct flavours work well. OK with the steak, and tannins work well with fatty lamb chops.'

13/20 Conde de Aroaz Rioja Reserva 2001, Spain £7.98 (Asda)

Comments on this moderately priced Best Buy red included 'redcurrant style seasons the lamb in the same way a sauce would' and 'lots of spice – works brilliantly with the lamb'.

Also try...

BEST RUNNER-UP

Sileni Unoaked Chardonnay 2005, New Zealand (Thresher, £8.99) 14/20 came second overall. Its good fruit and refreshing acidity worked well with the lighter dishes.

BEST ROSÉ

Tariquet Rosé 2004, Famille Grassa, France (Somerfield, £5.99) 13/20 was described as pleasant, creamy and great with vegetable kebabs.



Tariquet Rosé: the best of our three rosés

Log on to www.which.co.uk for the full set of results, plus tips from wine writer Susy Atkins on serving wine at barbecues

Think of the wine as a bit like a sauce. The richer the food, the more powerful the wine should be

How we test

Aroma, acidity and richness are key factors in determining how well a wine performs

It isn't just about fruity flavours. Our tasters first look at texture and colour: is it thin, viscous, pale, clear, dark? Then they swirl and smell it, to assess freshness and character. Next, they taste it and think about its qualities on the first sip and on the 'finish'. Then comes the hard bit: they spit it out.

We buy our wines from shops, to ensure they're typical samples, and wrap the bottles in opaque bags, so our tasters aren't swayed by outside factors. Each taster awards each wine a score out of 20. We average the scores and round to the nearest whole figure, to find the overall ranking.