



Host a Wine Tasting Party

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A Few Words About Wine

If you don't know a vintage from a variety—or think that "appellation" is just a strange spelling of that mountain range out East—it's easy to cave into the intimidation factor and start planning a backyard cookout rather than a wine tasting party.

Beginners can start by understanding a few terms from the labels:

Appellation: Generally, this is the name of the region in which a particular grape was grown. This can be a state (such as California), a geographic area (Napa Valley, California; Chablis, France), or simply the vineyard itself.

Winery: The person or company who actually produced or bottled the wine (Zanetta, for example).

Variety: The kinds of grapes, such as merlot, chardonnay, and zinfandel, in a particular wine. Labels of French and Italian wines don't usually list the variety. That's because in these and some other wine-growing nations, law mandates that wines from a designated appellation must be made from particular varieties of grapes. For example, if a wine carries the Chablis appellation, it will be made of chardonnay grapes—so there's no need to list that on the bottle's label.

Vintage: The grape harvest of a particular year.

Varietal: A wine that is made mostly from one grape variety.

Choices, Choices

Part of the fun of planning a wine tasting party is to decide which wines to sample. Although no one will have a bad time if you take a "little bit of this, little bit of that" approach, guests will gain more understanding of and appreciation for particular wines if you choose a theme. For our tasting, we selected 1997-vintage red wines, including merlots, cabernets, and Bordeaux.

Other theme possibilities:

By wine makers within a region: For example, you could taste a range of varietals (same- grape wines) from wine makers in the Sonoma, California, region.

By price within a region: Pit inexpensive, midrange, and expensive Bordeaux wines against each other, for example. You may be surprised.

By grape across regions: How about tasting chardonnays from around the world, comparing those from California, Australia, France, South America, etc.?

By grape within the red or white categories: Try tasting different reds against each other—for example, three merlots and three cabernets. Or different whites—try three chardonnays and three sauvignon blancs. It's fun to see if you can discern the qualities of each grape.



By wine type: Try popping the cork on sparkling wines from Limoux or Saumur, France, or from Spain—and compare them to a real champagne, from the Champagne region of France.

Setting the Table

Start with white tablecloths to cover tables where the wine will be poured and tasted. White linens are part of the taster's tools: Guests hold their glasses against the white background to examine the wine color.

On top of the tables, arrange:

Bottle coverings: For a blind tasting like ours, place each bottle in a numbered paper bag. The advantage of tasting blind? Fancy labels won't sway guests.

Wineglasses: Professional tastings would necessitate a fresh glass for each wine, but for an easygoing at-home tasting with friends, one glass per person is sufficient. Just have a pitcher of water handy for rinsing between rounds.

Corkscrews: Many models are available, so pick the type you're comfortable using. Keep a few on hand—the party could come to a screeching halt if your only corkscrew gets misplaced halfway through the event.

Dump buckets: People may wish to dump wine from their glass if they don't want to finish it. Although professional tasters do this often, it's more likely that at an informal tasting with relatively few wines, guests will just "swallow and enjoy."

Pitchers of ice water and glasses: These will allow guests to cleanse their palates between samples.

Pens and notepads: Even at informal tastings, each person should be encouraged to make a few notes about the wines. The notes will serve to remind guests which wines they tasted and enjoyed.

Bread: Professional tasters don't always agree on what, if any, food should be served at a wine tasting. Although we eventually judge wines in part by how they pair with foods we like, food changes the taste of wine and a tasting without food allows a different, clearer point of view. If you do wish to put some food out for the tasting, serve cubes of unsugared white bread. Save the rest of your party menu for after the official taste tests are complete.

Ready, Set, Sip!

Now for the fun part! Before taking that first sip, remember that some red wines need to aerate, or "breathe," which means simply that you need to open and expose them to oxygen for a while before they're ready to drink. Serve all wines at the correct temperature. Consult your wine



merchant, a good Web site, or a book to find out proper serving temperatures for the wines you're trying, as well as whether they should be allowed to breathe—and for how long.

The proper order for tasting is: whites before reds, sparkling before still, light-bodied before full-bodied, and young before old.

If your guests are novices to the world of wine tastings, advise them to try the following techniques:

Take a look: Fill the glass about one-third full. Grasping the glass by the stem (to avoid warming the wine with your hands), hold the goblet so the tablecloth appears behind the wine. Note the beverage's appearance. Is it bright? Murky? Dark? Light?

Take a whiff: Close your eyes and swirl the liquid around in the glass to release its odors. Then inhale to note the aromas. Is it fruity—like pears, berries, or apples? Or chocolaty? Does it remind you of a woody-like oak? Or earthy-like mushrooms? The aroma speaks to the grape as well as the vessel in which the wine was aged.

Take a sip: Start with a medium sip. Swish it around a little, thinking about how it feels in your mouth. Heavy or light? Sweet or sour? Greasy or smooth? Consider the flavors you're experiencing: Is it spicy or citrusy? Peppery, grassy, or gamy? Swallow, or spit the wine into a bucket, and be sure to consider the aftertaste, too. Does it linger? Is it pleasant?

Take some notes: Encourage everyone to jot down thoughts. Guests can discuss each wine after everyone has tasted it. Or move on to the next selection and discuss all the types once you've worked through the array. Either way, before everyone tries a new wine, remind guests to completely rinse their glasses and cleanse their palates with a drink of water or nibble of bread.

Words for Wine Tasters

Talking about the wine—and then seeing where the conversation takes you—is the essence of a wine tasting party. However, it's the area in which novices feel most adrift. Here are a couple of ways to get the conversation started:

Give guests a list of smell and taste words that are often attributed to wine. Include words such as "fruity," "vegetative," "nutty," "woody," and "pungent," along with descriptive qualities of each. See www.wineloverspage.com for a full range of information, from a wine tasting course to reports on wines around the world.

Have tasters mention whether the wine recalls another wine they've had in the past—or even another drink or food. Ask associative questions, such as: Does the wine recall fruit? Does it have a chocolaty quality?

Make your guests feel at ease about wine jargon. Wine tasting parties should be for pleasure, not for testing erudition. After all, the best wine is "the one you like best."



What To Eat

There's something about a wine tasting that begs for a good selection of cheese. If you're serious about getting a clear, unaffected taste of the wine, you should hold the food until later. But once the sampling is over, toast your newfound favorites over a spread of well- chosen cheeses.

About Us

K.D. Imports, LLC is based in South Florida, USA and imports fine wines primarily from Italy.

The wines of **K.D. Imports, LLC** have had the honor of appearing on several "Wine Spectator Award of Excellence" wine lists throughout the USA and have been featured at both the Chicago and New York City Wine Enthusiast "Toast of the Town" wine tasting galas. Our San Giulio Prosecco has even been featured on NBC's "Today Show."

For more information on our company, our products, or opportunities to partner with us, please visit www.kdwineimports.com or visit us on [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#).

