

What wines go with goat cheese?

BY BILL DALEY
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Goat cheese is sold in dozens of varieties from tangy white rolls, often adorned with peppercorns or fresh herbs, to aged specimens almost as sturdy as Parmesan. Your choice of wine has to change depending on what kind of cheese you buy, but that choice can be intimidating.

Enter Jan Henrichsen, wine buyer at Chicago's Pastoral shop, with very simple, sensible advice.

"The firmer the goat cheese, the bigger the wine," she said, noting that goat cheese loses moisture as it ages, developing a denser texture and a fattier, saltier taste profile. "Texture is the rule for figuring out what to pour."

For most people, the term "goat cheese" means those cute cylinders, pyramids and discs of fresh or lightly aged varieties.

"Although it is tangy and pungent, goat cheese is relatively delicate since it is lower in fat than cow's milk cheese," said Tracy Lewis Liang, wine and spirits director of Treasure Island Food stores. "Therefore you don't want a super big wine that will overwhelm the cheese. Think cool-climate wines: crisp white and light reds."

The adage, what grows together, goes together, also can be used here.

"A great place to look is the age-old affinity of Loire Valley wine with Loire goat cheese," said Chris Speir, wine manager at the Binny's Beverage Depot store in Willowbrook, Ill. "The bright acidity in both meets

and mellows each other out, creating a creamier impression from the cheese and a rounder, fruitier one from the wine."

The classic combo is chèvre, fresh goat's milk cheese, and sauvignon blanc (especially Sancerre in the Loire), but you don't have to stop at France for the wine. Look for crisp sauvignon blancs and other like varietals around the world.

Efrain Madrigal, wine director of Sam's Wines & Spirits stores, likes a Spanish Rueda and said that a Greek moschofilero is great with a goat feta cheese. Liang likes a Spanish albarino from Galicia and sauvignon blanc from New Zealand. Henrichsen urges consumers to try chenin blanc, pinot blanc and pinot gris.

Red wines are more problematic with goat cheese. Henrichsen advises steering clear of the big, tannic varieties that will either wipe out the cheese entirely or trigger some strange taste sensations.

Liang looks to the Loire for red-wine inspiration.

"A Bourgeuil or an Anjou rouge, both made from cabernet franc, have enough fruit to complement the cheese but are light enough so as not to clobber the flavor combination with tannins or alcohol," she said. An Austrian zweigelt or blaufränkisch might also work.

Henrichsen likes pinot noir with goat cheese. Style matters here; weighty, big pinots — what she calls "'Sideways' pinots" from the movie — won't work. She thinks pinots from Oregon and Washington, especially the Willamette Valley, "absolutely go" with goat cheese.

