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## Understanding Red Wine: How to Decide If Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Malbec, or Syrah Is Your Preferred Style

Learn how to choose a red you'll enjoy.

By Sarah Tracey | August 08, 2019



Delicate and elegant or rich and robust, there's a red wine out there for every lover of the glorious grape. Where to start? Try one of these four very different reds: cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir, malbec, and syrah. Here's what to know to get started plus how to pair them with food-and some sommelier favorites.

It's important to note that red wine grape varieties aren't all created equal: They are as different from each other as granny smith, golden delicious, and McIntosh apples. Each unique grape variety creates a completely different wine in terms of aroma, texture, flavor profile, and body. With that said, grape varieties themselves are only one aspect of the finished wine. Other factors that influence the final result are the climate and soil types in which the grapes are grown, as well as the type of barrel the wine is aged in and the length of time the wine is aged before it's released. It's fun to try different examples of a certain grape to see if there's a certain growing region or winemaking style that you prefer.

Here's some basic information to inform your red wine drinking.

### Cabernet Sauvignon

Considered by many wine lovers to be the king of hearty reds, cabernet sauvignon (cab-er-NAY so-vin-YAWN) is originally from the Bordeaux region of France, where's it's most commonly blended with merlot. The cabernet sauvignon grape has a thick, hearty skin, which, along with its seeds and stems, contributes tannin to the wines-that's the compound that makes your tongue turn prickly and dry and it's also commonly experienced in black tea. Anyone that has ever over-steeped a cup of black tea knows exactly what this sensation feels like.

Because red wines get their color and much of their texture and flavor from the grape skins, the thicker skins of cabernet sauvignon create a rich, concentrated, and purple/black, full-bodied wine that does best in warm climates because it's a late ripening grape. Common flavors in cabernet sauvignon include blackberry and black currant, green bell pepper and herbs, coffee, and bittersweet cocoa.

The most famous, much heralded growing region for cabernet sauvignon in the U.S. is the Napa Valley, which produces the most premium and highly regarded examples of this coveted wine. Because luxurious wines often come with luxurious price tags, the best Napa cabernet can be relatively expensive (splurges include **Far Niente 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon** and Inglenook Cabernet Sauvignon 2015). However, you can still get premium examples of Napa cabernet for under \$100 a bottle (we like Cade Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2016 and Jamieson Ranch Vineyards Double Lariat Cabernet Sauvignon 2015). For those seeking affordable "weeknight" cabernets, it's best to look outside Napa: Lodi in California has some wonderful options like Noble Vines 337 Lodi Cabernet Sauvignon 2016. And definitely pay attention to Washington State which is emerging as another fantastic place for world class cabernet: we think Columbia Crest Grand Estates Cabernet Sauvignon 2016 is a great deal.

Cabernet sauvignon is a classic pairing with red meat because the tannins in the wine help cut through the rich, marbled texture of the fat in the meat. Try a cab with Seared Strip Steaks with Braised Peppers and Onion.