

# Summer wines for chilling and grilling

**F**riday backups on the Bay Bridge. Easy-to-come-by Saturday night reservations at popular restaurants. Sunburned and exhausted tourists on the Mall. These are just a few indications that summer is now in full swing in Washington. Plus, it's getting a tad hot and humid around here. But the good news is — other than the reduced traffic around town — it also signals the beginning of grilling season.

There is something about cooking food outside on the grill that just seems to make everything taste better. I love grilling a wide variety of foods, including everything from fresh fish, chicken and vegetables to the traditional grill-fare of burgers and New York strip steaks. I have even attempted — with remarkable success — grilled peaches and nectarines for dessert.

However, finding the right wine to slide alongside can be a tricky assignment, particularly if marinades and sauces play a prominent role in the recipe. So, when I am cooking up fish and poultry, I have a tendency to look for white wines that feature abundant acidity. If I decide to spice up the flavor profile or throw shellfish on the barbie, then I will turn to white wines that have just a touch of residual sugar to help bring all of the flavors into focus. When red meat is on the menu, I reach for red wines that tend to be more fruit-forward on the palate and possess significant tannins that cut through the fat.

Here are several summer sippers to serve up with your favorite grilled foods. Retail prices are approximate.

I have been drinking a lot of chenin blanc wines lately, and one of my favorites is the **2010 Jean-Marc Gilet Vouvray Sec (\$15)**. This extremely versatile and food friendly wine has a lovely nose of white peaches and nectarines, with hints of white flowers. In the mouth, delicate flavors of tropical fruit, stone fruits and ripe pear are carried along the palate by excellent acidity. The wine is slightly off-dry and the slightly sweet flavors contrast nicely with the notes of citrus, mango and minerals that linger on the long, refreshing finish. It is a delicious match with shellfish

or slightly spicy fare like chili-lime marinated seafood. **QPR 9**

Fresh vegetables from our garden receive special treatment on the grill, and they deserve a special wine, such as the **2011 Jim Barry "The Lodge Hill" Riesling (\$17)** from the Clare Valley of South Australia. The nose offers up aromas of apple blossoms, white peach and apricots. The substantial acidity provides a lovely platform for flavors of mango, honeydew melon and ripe nectarine up front, while notes of lemongrass and kumquats file in on the back. The bone-dry finish features abundant acidity and keeps the palate refreshed. Enjoy with grilled zucchini, mushrooms and eggplant. **QPR 8.5**

If salmon is on the menu, then pinot noir can't be far behind. I think pinots with delicate fruit complement the rich flavors of the fish. The **2009 Bethel Heights Pinot Noir (\$30)** from the Willamette Valley of Oregon displays aromas of red currant and Asian spices and elegant flavors of strawberry, cherry and red plum that float on the tongue with finesse and charm. Notes of cranberry play out on the earthy finish where soft-grained tannins add structure and balance. It is a perfect with cedar plank salmon. **QPR 8.5**

In our house, a grilled hamburger has been elevated to an art form. We make every accoutrement a burger could want, so we go a little overboard with the wine we like to have with it. This year, it is the **2009 Belasco Swinto Malbec (\$27)** from Mendoza, Argentina. Now normally, malbec would not be the first grape varietal I would think to pair with a burger, but the Swinto is heightened by malolactic fermentation in new French oak barrels and then aged in the same barrels for 15 months. This produces a complex, rich wine with aromas of earthy dark fruit on a fragrant bouquet. Generous flavors of blackberry jam, dark cassis and spicy black cherry are full and forward in the mouth. Sweet tannins provide enough grip to cut through the fat while allowing the subtle notes of toasty oak to shine on the luscious finish. **QPR 9.5**

**Note:** QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.

