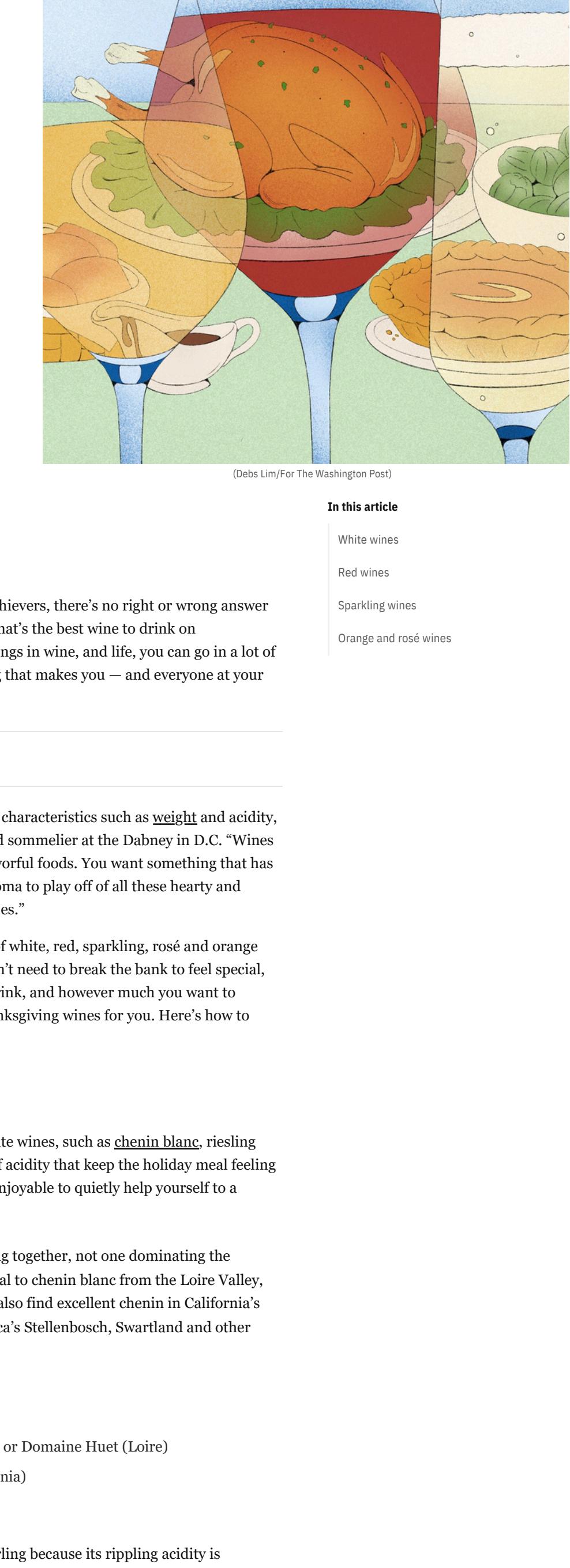


Wine

## The best wines for Thanksgiving — and how to pick them

Strategies to finding great red, white, orange and rosé wines at various price points.

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(Debs Lim/For The Washington Post)

Column by Emily Saladino

With all due respect to overachievers, there's no right or wrong answer to the perennial question, "What's the best wine to drink on Thanksgiving?" Like many things in wine, and life, you can go in a lot of directions and find something that makes you — and everyone at your holiday table — happy.

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The trick is to zero in on wine characteristics such as weight and acidity, explains Cristian Urbina, head sommelier at the Dabney in D.C. "Wines can get lost behind richer, flavorful foods. You want something that has enough acid and body and aroma to play off of all these hearty and comforting Thanksgiving dishes."

Fortunately, there are plenty of white, red, sparkling, rosé and orange wines that fit the bill. They don't need to break the bank to feel special, either. Whatever you like to drink, and however much you want to spend, there's an array of Thanksgiving wines for you. Here's how to find them.

### White wines

Textured, medium-bodied white wines, such as chenin blanc, riesling and vermentino, deliver lots of acidity that keep the holiday meal feeling fresh and make it even more enjoyable to quietly help yourself to a second round of stuffing.

"The wine and food are dancing together, not one dominating the other," Urbina says. He's partial to chenin blanc from the Loire Valley, particularly vouvray. You can also find excellent chenin in California's Central Coast, plus South Africa's Stellenbosch, Swartland and other regions.

Try bottles from:

- Domaine Frantz Saumon or Domaine Huet (Loire)
- Field Recordings (California)
- Kloof Street (Swartland)

Dry riesling is a sommelier darling because its rippling acidity is incredibly food-friendly. Some of my favorite places to find it are:

- The Finger Lakes region (New York)
- Willamette Valley (Oregon)
- Mosel Valley and Nahe regions (Germany)
- Alsace (France)

On German wine labels, the driest expressions are called trocken; Willi Schaefer and Enrich-Schönleber's rieslings are usually easy to find in the United States.

If your Thanksgiving wine budget is especially bountiful this year, Burgundian chardonnay combines holiday-worthy opulence with mineral notes and bright acidity. White burgundy is an investment, but you can often find value in those from the Chablis region, particularly compared with other areas within the region, such as Meursault or Chassagne-Montrachet, says Michael Brooks, the owner of Bed-Vyne Wine & Spirits in Brooklyn.

Perhaps you're lucky enough to live near a shop with a deep bench of global bottles; in that case, add a dry furmint from Hungary to your holiday lineup. Textured and tart, its herby undertones complement sage-scented Thanksgiving foods such as this pumpkin crostata or skillet sweet potatoes. "Furmint is one of those high-acid, lip-smacking, 'What am I ever drinking?' kinds of white wine that keeps all its converts coming back for more," says Shannon Saulsbury, the wine and sake program manager at Flagship Restaurant Group in Omaha. Keep an eye out for furmints from Royal Tokaji — a label renowned for its world-class sweet wines — Disznókő, and Oremus.

### Red wines

Many wine professionals consider gamay from Beaujolais a foolproof Thanksgiving pairing. It's low in alcohol and in tannins — the compounds that dry your mouth out after you sip — so it won't overpower even the most tender slice of turkey. Plus, it has enough texture and refreshing acidity to play ball with starchy sides such as macaroni and cheese or mashed potatoes with roasted garlic. It's great with a chill, too. Domaine Jean Foillard has a range of gamays at different price points, as does Yann Bertrand.

A slightly deeper cut equally suited to Thanksgiving tables is cabernet franc. Look for versions from regions with historically cooler climates, such as the Loire Valley, Finger Lakes and Washington state's Columbia Valley. "Cab franc really shines during Thanksgiving because you've got those cranberry and sour cherry notes, and also the sage, pepper and high acidity that refreshes the palate," says Brooks. "It just enhances the overall experience." He plans to pour one of Forge Cellars' cabernet francs at his holiday table.

I've also tasted great bottles from:

- Quady North (Oregon)
- Savage Grace (Washington state)
- Domaine Amirault's Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil (France)
- Hermann J. Wiemer (New York)

Fuller-bodied, higher-alcohol red wines with grippy tannins risk overpowering starch- and poultry-driven Thanksgiving menus. But if you can't imagine a holiday meal without a big, bold red wine, try a merlot-heavy Right Bank bordeaux that's four years old or older, says **Andrew Limberg, director of operations at Moon Rabbit restaurant in D.C.** "If it has a little bit of age, the bigger tannins and a lot of the more aggressive flavors like that pencil lead and almost chalky taste on the back palate are going to be gone. It mellows out the wine and gives it a little more balance." **At Moon Rabbit, he pours a 2015 Château Gueyrosse from Saint-Émilion, Bordeaux, a merlot-forward, food-friendly red that's spent enough time in the bottle to smooth its grip.**

### Sparkling wines

Searching for one wine to go with all your Thanksgiving dishes? "Be the person who brings the bubbles," Urbina says. With low alcohol and laser-sharp acidity, champagne is a literal cheat code when it comes to pairing wine with food because it goes with everything," he says. "A rich, ripe glass of champagne with turkey? That would have me dying."

The following sparklers — all from the Champagne region — are a few that I'd love to sip on Thanksgiving, or any night of the year:

- Champagne Gosset
- Eric Rodez
- Philipponnat
- Jacquesson
- Émilien Feneuil

If champagne is out of your price range, cavas, crémants and franciacortas are all made using the same technique. So are select sparklers from the Finger Lakes, Willamette Valley, and Napa, California. Seek out bottles that say traditional method, méthode traditionnelle or méthode champenoise on their labels.

### Orange and rosé wines

Orange and rosé wines not only bridge the gap between reds and whites, but can also carry you from appetizers to turkey legs. The caveat is the variability within each category. These wines can be made with various red or white grapes, a range of maceration times, and fermentation in stainless steel, amphorae, or other vessels.

To find an orange wine that's fresh and lively, your best bet is to ask a somelieperson for a lighter-bodied, high-acid and not-too-funky suggestion. I've swooned over bottles that fill this description from the Central Coast and Berkeley, California, and from places with centuries-old orange winemaking traditions such as:

- Georgia
- Slovenia
- Northeastern Italy

Flagship's Saulsbury suggests Cantina Piatto Ribolla Gialla: "You want more of it after each sip," she says. I'd add Iago's wine Chinuri from Georgia, and Donkey & Goat and Bonny Doon in California.

Rosés that hold their own at the Thanksgiving table can be identified visually. Rosado or Sangiovese rosé. You can also find deeper hues, from Napa that are darker-colored and have more boldness and structure."

Whichever wine you choose, the point of popping bottles on Thanksgiving isn't to attain some impossible high bar of gastronomic achievement. "I find that most people just want to have fun," says Limberg. "Don't force it."

"It's a holiday, after all. Drink what you love, and leave the stress behind. Unless, of course, that's you. In which case, let's pour you a glass."

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