

Pair Well, My Lovely: Spark a True Romance Between Your Food and Wine Selections

Planning the perfect Valentine's dinner? Remember that your food and wine will be on a date too. Worthy companions make for true romance between people, and the same goes for food and wine pairings. If you're sitting down to a steak dinner, it's pretty hard to go wrong with a well-rated Cab or Malbec, but playing matchmaker gets more challenging with other dishes.

Cheeses--With pungent blues, such as Stilton or Camembert, choose a Champagne or other sparkling wine to cut the high fat content of these strong cheeses without overpowering their distinctive flavors. A perky Pinot Noir or Sauvignon Blanc brings out the tanginess of goat cheese. For aged cheddar or Manchego, try a Petite Sirah or a California red blend.

Raw Oysters—February is a great month for Gulf Coast oysters, so be sure to savor a dozen or so of these tasty little aphrodisiacs ice cold on the half shell. The minerality of a French Chablis or a German Riesling will enhance their briny flavor.

Roasted or grilled fish—Simply prepared Branzino, flounder or other mild, flaky fish pairs well with a crisp white, such as an Italian Vermintino or a Portuguese Vinho Verde.

Cream-based pastas—For meatless pastas with a light cream or butter sauce, you can't go wrong with a bright, slightly buttery Chardonnay. For even richer, cheesier sauces, a Pinot Grigio will do wonders.

Chocolate—Contrary to popular belief, red wines and dark chocolate do not play well together and will battle each other for control of your taste buds. If you and your sweetheart plan on finishing off the meal with a molten lava brownie *a la mode*, try a vintage port, whose sweet and sultry flavors go hand-in-hand with chocolate. Or, skip the wine and order a double espresso, because there's more to Valentine's Day than just dinner, and you'll want to stay awake for it.

Cheers to you!