

A beginner's guide to port wines

Port is perfect for enjoying with dessert any time of the year.

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Spring may be around the corner, but our chilly evenings still provide a good excuse for pouring yourself a warming glass of port.

Fortified wines, such as port, sherry, Marsala and Madeira, are wines that have had alcohol – typically brandy – added to them at some point during the production process. Consequently, they have higher alcohol content than most wines, hovering around 17 to 20 percent. Although they can be served with the main course, they make great drinks to accompany appetizers or for sipping after the main meal is finished.

We checked in with Mif Frank, co-owner of the Arrow Wines and Spirits store in Kettering, for tips on trying port.

“I think port is growing in popularity,” he said. “It’s great for people to try who enjoy something a little sweeter and don’t mind that it has higher



Mif Frank, co-owner of Arrow Wine and Spirits in Kettering, recommends that customers curious about drinking port start with a ruby port. CONTRIBUTED

alcohol content.”

Out of all the fortified wines, port is the most popular, Frank said. Most of his sales for sherry, Marsala and Madeira tend to be for people planning to use it for cooking.

If you enjoy sweet wines, try a ruby port. “Ruby is typical-

ly sweeter and is pretty much for immediate consumption,” Frank said. “It’s along the lines of a table wine.”

Ruby ports tend to be among the least expensive of ports.

Tawny ports are made of a blend of wines aged in oak

BOTTLE RECOMMENDATIONS

As an entry level port: Noval Tawny Port, \$18.99

For something a little more special: Taylor Fladgate 10 Year Old Tawny Port, \$34.99

For something really special: Graham’s 20 Year Old Tawny Port, \$60

casks and take on a more amber color and a nuttier flavor than ruby ports. The age of tawny ports tends to be designated on the bottle in increments of 10, 20 and 30 years. The higher the number, the pricier the bottle. Unlike ruby ports, a bottle of tawny port can last for several months after opening.

Vintage ports are your most expensive option. These ports are rarer, in that they are only bottled typically every few years, using only the best grapes from the best vineyards. They can be aged for anywhere from 20 to 50 years. Once opened, drink up. “Once it’s opened, it must be consumed,” Frank warned.

Although it is associated with winter, Frank said port

can be enjoyed in the warmer months. “Try a white port,” he said. “For a spring cocktail, mix white port and club soda with a squeeze of lemon. It’s really refreshing and not super sweet. It’s a nice, easy cocktail.”

Port is perfect for enjoying with dessert. “Typically, I would drink it with slightly sweeter dishes,” Frank said. Think of chocolate or berry desserts. Or try serving it with cheese, either a blue cheese such as Stilton, or an aged cheddar.

Or just skip the food altogether. “Port is also very drinkable just on its own,” Frank said.

Since you typically only consume a few ounces at a time, don’t serve port in a huge glass. If you don’t have actual port glasses, try serving it in the smallest red wine glasses you own.

After buying a bottle, if you plan to drink it right away, storing it at room temperature is just fine, Frank said. Otherwise, lay it on its side in a cool cellar and let it age just as you would a fine wine.

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