

# Create a winning seder with great wine

■ JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Tradition in my family dictates that Passover is a time for cheap, super-sweet wine. Why, I wonder, when we all love and appreciate good wine during the rest of the year, are we drinking this, something we don't really like, on a holiday, when we should be enjoying something special? Maybe it's time for tradition to change.

Like everything kosher, the rules for making wine are more complicated than simply using equipment that hasn't touched pork. According to Jewish law, the grapes from a kosher vineyard can't be used until the fifth year. Other fruits and vegetables can't be grown with them. The fields must be left fallow once every seven years.

No animal products can be used in the process (non-kosher wineries sometimes use gelatin to clarify the wine). And the wine must be produced entirely by Jews. No wonder good kosher wines have been hard to find.

What's worse is that some of these wines are heated or even boiled to "purify" them in case a non-Jew (such as a waiter) ever handles them. These particular kosher wines are called *mevushal*. If you have ever left a bottle too close to the stove while cooking, you know the disastrous effect heat can have on wine. If you are more comfortable with a *mevushal* wine, a better option — flash pasteurization — alters the taste only slightly.

Fortunately for those of us who like our wine on the sophisticated side, more and more really good kosher wines are being produced every year. Below, a few to try. As for the "traditional" stuff? Yes, there will always be someone who requests one of these at the seder. I use what's left in the bottle to make a fantastic sweet-and-tangy sauce for brisket.

## 2005 YARDEN SAUVIGNON BLANC, \$14

The grapes for this Israeli take on this classic dry white wine are grown in the northern Golan Heights, the coldest region in Israel — perfect for this style. The result is a bright, almost lemony, wine that pairs well with food. A portion of the wine ferments and ages in French oak barrels, resulting in a touch of oak that gives it complexity without overwhelming the palate. Try it with a salad or vegetables marinated in vinaigrette, roasted chicken or turkey, or even fish. Serve chilled.

## 2003 GALIL MOUNTAIN YIRON, \$24

This deep red wine — a blend of 61 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 32 percent Merlot, and seven percent Syrah — comes from the Galilee viticultural area, which is considered the best wine growing area in Israel. Full-bodied and complex, it's the best of all the grapes that make it up, with flavors like black cherries, blackberries and ripe



The right wine will complement whatever you're serving at your seder.

plums. Dry and lightly tannic, it will stand up to strong flavors. The finish is spicy, making it a wonderful match for savory Sephardic dishes like lamb with cinnamon. Buy a few extra bottles to save for years to come — stored properly, it will mellow and age well for the next five to seven years. Serve slightly below room temperature.

## 2002 YARDEN SYRAH, \$28

For something a little more special, try this aged Syrah, also from Yarden. Lighter in body than the Yiron, this dark-purple wine immediately makes you think of ripe cherries, wild berries and — thanks to time spent aging in French oak barrels — chocolate. It would go well with brisket and lamb, or try it for dessert with a rich flourless chocolate torte. 2002 was an especially good year for this wine, so again, buy a few extra bottles if you like it and let them age — they'll continue to get better for the next 10 years. Serve slightly below room temperature.

## 2005 BARTENURA MOSCATO, \$10

Not all kosher wine comes from Israel. If you like a sweet wine for a sweet holiday, this lightly sparkling white from one of the most popular wineries in Italy is a real crowd-pleaser. And at \$10 a bottle, it's affordable, too.

A full, rich aroma reminiscent of peaches and flowers and a light pear-and-grapey taste make this a hit with people who normally don't consider themselves wine drinkers. The finish is sweet, but not cloyingly so. It's terrific before the meal with a salad, or served as a dessert wine. You'll find this Moscato is amazing when paired with fruit, such as poached pears or strawberries in meringue shells. Best of all, a low alcohol content (five percent) means that most of your guests can drink four glasses of the stuff and still walk straight at the end of the seder. For the best results, refrigerate until 10 minutes before serving.

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