

FOOD TRENDS

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What drinks to pair with Chinese takeout

By Michelle Locke The Associated Press

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This Jan. 5, 2015, photo shows pairing wine and Chinese takeout food in Concord, N.H. The bold flavors of Chinese takeout require an equally bold spirit to commend wine pairings.

AP Photo/Matthew Mead

What wine pairs best with Chinese takeout? Short answer: beer.

The truth is, typical takeout, with its bold flavours of ginger, chili and soy sauce, is enough to stump even the savviest sommelier.


"Having a Chinese wife and spending holidays eating my mother-in-law's cooking has given me plenty of opportunities to experiment matching wines to Chinese food, and it's not so easy," says Alder Yarrow, San Francisco-based founder of the popular site Vinography.com and author of *The Essence of Wine*.

But there's hope for those who want wine with their wontons: Think German.

"The stuff in takeout Chinese that really wreaks havoc with wine is the spicy stuff, in particular heavy ginger and chili paste," says Yarrow. "But all but the most extreme concentrations of these ingredients can still find a nice match in lightly sweet riesling and off-dry gewurztraminer, (another German white wine), both of which are by far the best pairings with Chinese food around."

That is unless you're ordering General Tso's chicken, the sweet and spicy fried chicken dish that is an occasional guilty pleasure for Yarrow. "There's really no wine that can deal with the sweet, double-fried craziness of that dish."

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The advertisement features a top-down view of a sesame seed bun burger with a beef patty, cheese, and pickles, alongside a bowl of golden-brown onion rings. The Seamless logo is in a red box at the top left. Below it, the text "CALLING TO ORDER?" is in large, bold, black letters, followed by "You're doing it wrong." in a smaller font. A yellow button with the text "ORDER NOW" is positioned below the text. The background is a light, textured surface.

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But for the rest of the menu, here are some pairing suggestions from Yarrow and others.

RIESLING

The overall go-to wine for Chinese takeout. Yarrow likes his at the level of sweetness designated as “spatlese.” You’ll find this on the label. Ditto for Andy Myers, master sommelier and wine director of chef Jose Andres’ ThinkFoodGroup in Washington, D.C., who admits to being “a bit of a lunatic” about spatlese riesling and the duck noodle soup from Chinatown Express, a D.C. Chinatown institution.

SPARKLING

Crisp and dry bubbly is another crowd-pleaser. Tamer Hamawi and Elise Rosenberg, principals and beverage directors of the Brooklyn restaurants Colonie and Gran Electrica, recommend sesame pancakes with Champagne and fortune cookies with moscato d’Asti, the Italian sparkler. And don’t forget rose sparkling wines.

MALBEC

Try this rich, red wine from Argentina with equally rich dishes, such as barbecued pork or spareribs, advises Yarrow.

MAI TAIS

Skye LaTorre, beverage director of New York’s restaurant group The Meatball Shop, recommends pairing sesame chicken with a mai tai. “Dark rum and orgeat taps into the rich, toasty, nutty, sweetness of the chicken glaze while the citrus brightens the dish with acid.”

And for more along the cocktail line, Kevin Denton who oversees the cocktail program at Alder, the New York restaurant run by innovative chef Wylie Dufresne, has these suggestions for pre-dinner drinks to get you in the takeout spirit. Try mixing a spicy rye whiskey with ice-cold ginger beer and a squeeze of lime to cool chili heat. On a cold day, add a splash of aged rum to hot oolong tea with an orange peel “for a soothing, contemplative takeout session.”

SAISON BEER

Saison beer, also known as farmhouse ale, is a good match with its generally dry flavour profile. As proud Brooklynites, Hamawi and Rosenberg recommend Brooklyn Brewery's Sorachi Ace for its lemon characteristics and earthy peppery notes, a good choice for spicy and garlicky Sichuan dishes. And for something a little more widely available, Myers, of ThinkFoodGroup, "will admit to wrecking Miller High Life" with steamed dumplings in garlic vinegar.

SHERRY

Eben Klemm, partner and beverage director of King Bee in New York City, has a wine pairing with an ingenious twist. Serve aged sherry and soda (or lemon soda) over ice and use the orange wedges that come with delivery as a garnish. Also, make things easy on yourself and serve that sherry in plastic cups. "The whole point of takeout is that no one has to do dishes, am I right?" says Klemm.

Yes.

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