

Capital Gazette

Wine, etc.: These 12 wines go great with Memorial Day grill parties

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In our houses, the grill can be going any time of the year.

Snow? Give us a shovel. Rain? Give us an umbrella. But for most people, the starting gun to fire up the grill is Memorial Day. Besides being an occasion to honor those who have bravely served our country, it's a long weekend to reflect on a free democracy around a sizzling steak.

There is more to the grilling ritual than making smoke. First, there's some serious thought that goes into selecting steak, burgers, ribs or fish. You can't even start that discussion without a glass of wine. Then, there's a serious discussion with your spouse about who to invite. Really, do you want to start that without a glass of wine? Then there is a debate over the recipe and what wines to pour that won't cost more than a bag of charcoal. Better open another bottle as you peruse our list of the Top 12 red wines for a perfect barbecue.

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Grilled or smoked foods – barbecue is technically smoked – is often accompanied by tomato-based sauces. Together with meat's fat-and-juicy nature, sauces are best matched with boisterously juicy red wines that are focused on upfront fruit. Fortunately, these don't have to be expensive, which is good news if you have a crowd to please. Zinfandel, zinfandel-blends, syrah and malbec are good choices because they satisfy all these elements.

Gary Sitton, director of winemaking for Ravenswood, attributes the success of the zinfandel-barbecue match to the grape variety's "approachability, ripeness of the fruit profile and its acidity, which helps to balance fat."

Zinfandel is also an all-American grape for an all-American holiday.

Ravenwood is one of the most historic zinfandel producers in (Sonoma County), thanks largely to its founder Joel Peterson. At one time Ravenswood claimed one out of four zinfandels sold in the United States. It's iconic \$10 Vintner's Blend is largely credited with that success, and today it's still the brand's cash cow.

Here are our dozen suggested red wines to put next to this weekend's grill:

- Predator Old Vines Zinfandel 2015** (\$16). Made from Lodi vines ore than 50 years old, this complex zinfandel is a blockbuster. Deep and soft raspberry flavors with a dose of spice.

- Rutherford Ranch Two Range Red Wine 2014** (\$25). This delicious blend of petite sirah, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and syrah bursts on the palate with forwrad, juicy strawberry and raspberry flavors and a healthy dose of chocolate.

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