



Sipping al fresco

A well-packed picnic basket includes a bottle of pink wine

The moment the weather gets warm and the rainy season passes, sooner or later someone brings up the idea of going for a picnic — be it by the water, in a park or in your own backyard. And while the basket is easily filled with sandwiches, salads and various condiments, the real question should be, “What do we bring along to drink?”



Michael Pinkus

The bottle of water seems readily made for this day out and even a couple of those so-called “water enhancers” could bring a little flavour to it, but what if you’re feeling daring? Most of us know the antiquated



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laws of Ontario are restrictive and that open alcohol in a public place is a no-no, yet this same picnic in France or Italy would be a heresy if not accompanied by a bottle of something fermented, simple and local.

There are some easy recommendations to keep you satisfied and light enough for a summer's afternoon. Let's take a broad look at some of your summertime choices.

Everyone should know that summertime is the perfect opportunity to drink pink — but sadly, over the years, pink has become synonymous with sweet. Good news is the pendulum is swinging the other way. Sure, the pink sweet stuff is still made, but it's not food friendly; it's meant for quaffing and getting giddy with the girls (the sweeter the wine, the faster it hits the bloodstream). Those looking to add colour to dining al fresco will be glad to know there are plenty of pinks that'll do the trick. Look

toward Provence as the bellwether, but there's also some great local stuff from the likes of Malivoire, Château des Charmes and Henry of Pelham.

White is always a wonderful warm weather wine and two varietals that are perfect are Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc. Riesling is another wine that gets the noose of sweetness hung on to it, but there are some excellent dry versions out there as well. What you're really looking for is a balance of sweetness to acidity, a sweet wine with balanced acidity can taste drier and really pair well with food. Germany seems to lean sweet (that's sadly what the LCBO brings in) so look to local producers like Vineland, Tawse and Cave Spring.



Sauvignon Blanc is a beauty for hot weather. The good ones can be loaded with citrus in the form of grapefruit. Other great characteristics of Sauvignon Blanc also begin with "g" — grassy and gooseberry. Grassy may seem odd, but it's mostly in the aroma department, the palate can be more herbal instead. New Zealand has become the new home of Savvy B (as it can be called). While traditionalists might want to check out wines from its home of the Loire Valley in France, here at home, Trius has been known to make a good value version (if you're looking to get your tongue wet with the grape, so to speak). If you're looking to pull out something different and exciting, might I suggest exploring the world of Viognier. The grape



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BEFORE



AFTER

makes its home in southern France (Rhône valley) but has been popping up in different places of late such as California, Australia (where they mix it with shiraz) and right here at home. The grape tends to have floral and tropical fruit notes that can be very enticing. Nyarai Cellars and EastDell come to mind here in Ontario, while the Chilean company Cono Sur makes a delightfully fresh fruity version for not a lot of dough.

We may have some red drinkers out there that I can't lure to the lighter side, but I can try to steer you toward a couple of easy-drinking reds that should come in handy: Gamay and Valpolicella. Gamay is the fruity grape of Beaujolais



and delivers plenty of cherry with hints of white pepper when made well and, when lightly chilled, that red fruit can really pop. Look for producers like Trius, Malivoire and 13th Street in Ontario and there are a handful of French producers on LCBO shelves. If you really want a treat, look for wines made in the cru (special vineyard sites).

The other wine I mentioned was Valpolicella, which is actually a region in Italy where they blend three or more grapes together to form what could best be described as a pizza, pasta and burgers wine — an everyday drinker that doesn't overwhelm the pocket-book. Masi, Folonari and Bolla are usually reliable producers for these wines, but they are all over the LCBO. For picnicking, avoid Ripasso

and Amarone styles — too heavy.

Finally, if you're looking for bubbles, forego the champagne or sparkling wines — they can be heavy and cumbersome to carry — give a real Moscato a chance (and I am not talking the ones coming out of California). Moscato D'Asti is an Italian wine that's low alcohol with a touch of sweetness. It comes across with tropical fruit or sweet peaches. It also has just a touch of fizz (called pétillant, meaning "slightly sparkling") and what many don't realize is the hotter the day, the more perfect this wine will pair with it.

So get out there and enjoy the sunshine because, as Canadians, we all know it is going to get cold again sooner rather than later. ☺

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.

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