

HOLIDAY HINTS

'Tis The Season To Entertain: How To Impress Without The Stress

(NAPSA)—What's the secret to memorable holiday entertaining? Focus on what matters most: sharing delicious foods and distinctive wines with family and friends in a festive setting. Donata Maggipinto, contributor for NBC's "Today" show and author of several books on entertaining, helps people to impress their guests without the stress—and without a major investment of time or money.

She recommends stocking your pantry before the busy season, so you can spend time enjoying the holidays rather than becoming exhausted over them. Fill your kitchen with a variety of items, including crackers, nuts and other savory snacks; aromatics such as cinnamon sticks and crystallized ginger for adding holiday flavor and fragrance to foods; dried fruits to add pizzazz to a cheese plate.

"Have a selection of wine on hand, too," says Donata. "An assortment of bright, fruit-forward wines—that is, wines that have been made without a lot of oak so the fruit characteristics really come forward—will ensure perfect pairings for an array of holiday foods."

The most popular white wine is Chardonnay and the most popular red is Merlot, so you will be safe having those two staples, but use the holidays as an opportunity to experiment with other varietals. Choose a wine that is fruit-forward, such as those from Mirassou Winery, which pair nicely with a variety of foods. The key to success is offering a wide array of wine and cheese that will make your party memorable.

Here are a few cheese and wine pairing suggestions to get you started:



A wide selection of wine and cheese is a favorite for holiday get-togethers.

- Baked Brie with nuts is delicious with Chardonnay. The combination of creamy melted cheese will be enhanced with the crisp fruit flavors of the wine.

- Ivory-yellow Swiss cheeses such as Gruyère, with nutty, full-bodied flavor, will be complemented with a smooth Pinot Noir.

- Fresh mozzarella (bocconcini or buffalo mozzarella) is lovely with Merlot. The wine makes the cheese seem richer.

- Sauvignon Blanc pairs well with chèvre (goat cheese). The high acid content in the wine matches perfectly with the pungent acidity of the cheese.

- A good aged cheddar is the perfect match for Cabernet Sauvignon. Blue cheese also pairs well with this "king" of wine.

Create three to four festive plates with a variety of cheeses, spiced nuts, fruit, bread and crackers, and place throughout your entertaining area.

For additional wine and cheese pairing and preparation tips, visit www.mirassou.com.