

“Discover wine’s sweeter side”

Try our favorite holiday pairings: a dessert wine and a treat chosen to complement its delicate flavor

THEY AREN'T AS EXTRAVAGANT AS THEY SOUND—good dessert wines are available for less than \$20 a bottle and can be served for even the most casual get-together. Food editor Kim Sunée and wine and food columnist Becky Sue Epstein narrowed down the zillion choices to three basic varietals you'll love, picked the best bottles for the money, and gave us three easy recipes to accompany them. No matter which wine you're having, though, you can always serve it with mildly sweet dried fruits and nuts that you have on hand, or simply go for the classic contrast of blue cheese.

Just remember that as a rule, the wine should be sweeter than the food; otherwise, the sugar in the dish will overwhelm the subtle aromas and flavors of the wine. And keep in mind that a little goes a long way: A serving is only 2 to 3 ounces, so half bottles (375 ml.) are plenty for four to six people. You'll want to sip and savor the wine at 50 to 55 degrees—slightly warmer than your refrigerator. Pour into your smallest wineglasses or into tiny sipping glasses.



PRODUCERS KIM SUNÉE & BECKY SUE EPSTEIN
PHOTOGRAPHER CHARLES E. WALTON IV

Pairing #1:

Moscato D'Asti or Late Harvest Chenin Blanc with Chestnut Mascarpone Cups

KIM & BECKY'S UNDER \$20 WINE PICKS

SARACCO 2005, \$13.99 (750 ml.), available through Sam's Wines & Spirits; 800/777-9137 or samswine.com. A slightly sparkling wine made with the Moscato (Muscat) grape. It has an orange-flower aroma and a light, pleasant taste of honey.

2002 ONYX NOBLE, \$15.99 (375 ml. half bottle), available through Binny's Beverage Depot; 888/942-9463 or binnys.com. A South African dessert wine made from late-harvested Chenin Blanc grapes (see Glossary, below). This wine has a minerally, apricot aroma and feels pleasantly syrupy in the mouth with apricot and honey flavors and a lingering tropical finish.

CHESTNUT MASCARPONE CUPS

This creamy dessert is also delicious as a filling for crêpes.

MAKES: 6 to 8 servings **PREP:** 5 minutes

- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar
- 1 (8.8-ounce) container mascarpone cheese, softened
- 1 (8.75-ounce) can Crème de Marrons de L'Ardèche (chestnut spread)*
- 1/4 cup crème fraîche

GARNISH: cocoa

Beat powdered sugar and mascarpone at medium speed with an electric mixer 1 minute. Stir in chestnut spread and crème fraîche. Fill small espresso cups or other serving dishes; garnish, if desired. Serve immediately, or chill, removing from refrigerator 30 minutes before serving.

*Chestnut spread is available at most supermarkets. If you can't find it, check your local gourmet market or order at igourmet.com. >

RECIPE DEVELOPER & FOOD STYLIST: KIM SUNÉE; PROP STYLIST: MINDI SHAPIRO LEVINE



LATE HARVEST: wine made from grapes left on the vine for weeks after normal harvest time, allowing the grapes to ripen for extra sweetness

HOME COOKING WARM YOUR SOUL



Pairing #2: Sauternes with Buttery Roquefort Spread

KIM & BECKY'S UNDER \$20 WINE PICKS

2001 LAMOTHE DESPUJOLS, \$14.97 (375 ml. half bottle);

2001 MYRAT, \$17.97 (375 ml. half bottle);

2002 DOISY VEDRINES, \$14.97 (375 ml. half bottle),

all available through PJ Wine; 212/567-5500 or pjwine.com.

Expect Sauternes, made from Semillon or Sauvignon Blanc grapes, to have fresh aromas of tropical fruit and orange peel. It may also have hints of honey, saffron, and apricot. Yet the finest wines finish almost dry, often minerally. Look for Sauternes labeled "Cru Classé," indicating a consistently top-quality château.

BUTTERY ROQUEFORT SPREAD

Filling celery with this spread makes for a pretty presentation—and it's so easy.

MAKES: 2 to 4 servings **PREP:** 5 minutes

1/4 cup Roquefort or other high-quality blue cheese

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

1 tablespoon Sauternes wine

Pinch of pepper

Mix all ingredients with back of spoon until thoroughly blended. Serve at room temperature with celery sticks or toasted baguette slices.

FIND IT FAST

DESSERT WINES

Additional sources: wine.com or winecommune.com
(Alcohol shipping laws vary. To check laws in your state, visit wineinstitute.org/shipwine.)



Pairing #3: Essensia with Apricot Essensia Syrup

KIM & BECKY'S UNDER \$20 WINE PICKS

ESSENSIA, \$17 (750 ml.) by Quady Winery; 800/733-8068 or quadywinery.com. Enticing floral aromas become apricot and tropical in the mouth and end with a steely sweet finish.

APRICOT ESSENSIA SYRUP

Serve with panna cotta (eggless custard) or over ice cream or crêpes.

COOK: 35 minutes

1 cup Essensia or Sauternes wine

8 to 10 whole dried apricots

2 tablespoons honey

1/2 vanilla bean, split

Combine all ingredients in small saucepan; bring to a boil, and reduce heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, 35 minutes or until reduced to about 2/3 cup. Remove vanilla bean, and reserve for garnish, if desired. Chill until ready to serve. Refrigerate, covered, up to 1 week. ■

Bonus! For our Vanilla Bean Panna Cotta recipe (fantastic with Apricot Essensia Syrup), visit COTTAGELIVING.COM