

Match Game

SPRING VEGETABLES PRESENT UNIQUE WINE-PAIRING CHALLENGES.

Spring on the Central Coast is the time to begin enjoying garden-sourced vegetables, but some, such as artichokes, asparagus, and the brassicas (cabbage, kale, cauliflower, and their relatives) present unique challenges when it comes to finding ideal wine matches.

It seems a Ph.D. in organic chemistry is necessary to fully understand the issue, but wine science educator Deborah Parker Wong can provide some insight into what happens when certain vegetables meet the palate. Take artichokes, for example: “A taste-obliterating compound in artichokes called *cynarine* blocks most of the taste receptors for acid, bitterness, and salt, making anything you eat or drink taste vaguely sweet.” Parker Wong suggests light-bodied red wines to counter that effect. On the other hand, she says, “When pairing wine with brassicas or asparagus, combat their notably high levels of *organosulfur* compounds and *methoxy-pyrazines* with dry, aromatic white wines. Steer clear of wines with overt greenness or pungency, which will only amplify green flavors, and opt for tropical, fruit-driven, or perfumed white varieties to help mask those sulfurous aromas.”

“Methoxy-pyrazines” may be easy for a food scientist to say, but the issue takes on a more practical get-er-done side when you ask workaday sommeliers. At **Stonehaus** (the-stonehaus.com), the upscale enocentric tavern at the Westlake Village Inn, wine manager Tim Desmond opts for an aromatic Spanish varietal from Santa Barbara as



his go-to match for difficult vegetables. **Brick Barn Albariño, Santa Ynez Valley** (brickbarnwineestate.com), “offers good stone fruit and lemon zest flavors that pair well with the fresh spring veggies,” he says. “The wine’s great acid adds tanginess and keeps things light and fresh.”

The 805’s seasonal bounty is a *raison d’être* for Santa Barbara’s **The Lark** (thelarksb.com), where Acme Hospitality group wine director Hayden Felice recommends the **Tatomer Grüner Veltliner Meeresboden, Santa Barbara County** (tatomerwines.com), to accompany

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the restaurant's crispy Brussels sprouts with *medjool* dates, *garum*, serrano pepper, sesame, and lime. "Graham Tatomer's earth-driven grüner plays quite well with this dish," says Felice, noting the wine's affinity not only for the basic flavor of the vegetable (a tasty but notoriously sulfurous brassica) but also the dish's intriguingly spicy accents. "There's enough of grüner's earthy vegetal character to parallel the Brussels themselves and add a complementary umami character to augment the *garum* sauce, while it retains enough acidity and phenolics to drive through the lime, the sweetness of the *medjool* dates and fish sauce, and the hint of spice coming off the serranos."

Thomas Hill Organics (thomashillorganics.com) in Paso Robles is renowned for its seasonal cuisine. Wine buyer Christine Tweedie consulted with executive chef Kurt Metzger to find the best local wine to match with the chef's THO Spring Salad. Created especially for spring, it features baby kale, arugula, peaches, spring peas, shaved Parmesan, and a simple lime-Dijon mustard vinaigrette.



"We decided that the **Paix Sur Terre Kiler Grove Vineyard Ugni Blanc, Willow Creek District** [paixsurterrewines.com], would be the best wine for this dish," says Tweedie. This Paso Robles white is "an extremely versatile white wine for pairing with food. The Ugni Blanc's freshness and kiss of white pepper complement the snap peas and arugula and help neutralize the bitterness in the kale. The natural acidity in the wine plays perfectly with the vinaigrette."

Crisp white wines may seem like an intuitive match with most spring vegetables, but at **Granada Hotel & Bistro** (granadahotelandbistro.com) in downtown San Luis Obispo, front-of-house manager and wine buyer Ulisses Avina prefers red wines with some vegetable preparations. "Since our dishes have been designed to be stand-alones," says Avina, "we use wine to augment the main flavors in the dish. For instance, our roasted cauliflower comes with an olive tapenade; the savory **Stolo Vineyards Syrah** [stolofamilyvineyards.com] has hints of rosemary and bay leaf, which made an ideal accompaniment to the dish."



For Brussels sprouts, Avina takes a similar red-wine approach. "Our Brussels sprouts are fried and accompanied by dried cherry, pickled mustard seed, and goat cheese. The dried cherry really ties in with the **Chanin Wines Los Alamos Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara County** [chaninwine.com], which also has a slight earth note to it, as well as tobacco and herbs." The bottom line for Avina: "Wine and food should complement each other with neither stealing the show." ♦



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