

Rieslings are among Germany's finest white wines

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By Bill Garlough

When you think fall, you think of gorgeous colors, football and Oktoberfest celebrations. And when you think of Oktoberfest, you naturally think of German food and drink. While Oktoberfest is known for brats and beer (a lager style beer is best), German wines are also a staple and worth exploring.

Germany's two Rs – Rieslings and Rotweins (red wines)

Germany has a long tradition of quality wine making. This is somewhat surprising due to this country's northern location. Located in the 49-51 latitudes, Germany is on par with Newfoundland. Because of this northern climate, the Germans learned to position their vineyards with Southern exposures (for maximum sunlight), sloping into river valleys (to capture the warmth and moderation of water) and plant in soil and rocks that reflect sunshine (like slate). This approach is all designed to give their grapes the best chance to ripen. This has become less of a factor lately, as the Earth's climatic shifts have given Germany warmer weather for the past decade.



Bill Garlough
Level 1 Master Sommelier

Most of Germany's vineyards are located in the Rhine and Mosel river valleys, with the Rheingau, the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, the Rheinhessen and the Pfalz regions being the most important. Rieslings are Germany's most famous (white) wine, ranging from bone dry to super sweet. Their high acidity and sugar levels allow for long term ageing. Only 20% of Germany's production are Red wines, and are not as noteworthy.

Everyday German table wine is designated as QbA. Quality wine is termed QmP (Qualitätswein mit Prädikat). This category is broken into 6 grape ripeness levels. The Germans harvest their grapes at different times in the Fall/Winter, which determines the grape juice's sugar content. Kabinetts are the driest wines and Eiswein generally the sweetest wines. Look for the term Trocken if you prefer a very dry style.

Food Pairings

German wines tend to be low alcohol with high acidity. The benefits are the wine is food friendly and more quaffable. A glass of German Riesling may have an alcohol content of 7% versus a New World Chardonnay with 13-14%. The sweetness and good acidity of Rieslings are a favorite foil with spicy Asian dishes.

Two red varietals of distinction are Dornfelder and Spätburgunder. Dornfelder is an increasing popular wine due to its light and fruity character. They also have good acidity, are aromatic and easy to grow. Being light, they pair well with rich, heavy German food. Spätburgunders are Germany's Pinot Noir. This wine tends to be more complex, higher quality and more difficult to grow. Germans pair this with nicer meals, including pork and beef dishes.

My company, My Chef Catering, has been involved with Oktoberfest events for 16 years. The largest is the Rotary Clubs of Naperville Oktoberfest, which routinely draws 12,000 patrons annually. We have served the following family recipe at these events:

Spaetzle

2	Eggs
1 ½ Cups	Flour
½ tsp	Salt
1/3 Cup	Water
¼ tsp	Baking Powder – Optional for lighter Spaetzle
¼ cup	Buttered, toasted Bread Crumbs

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Lightly beat eggs. In a separate large bowl, mix together the dry ingredients. Add the eggs and beat until smooth and elastic. If too thick, add more water. Spoon half the mixture into a potato ricer. Press down the lever and the strands of dough will drop into the boiling water. Stir spaetzle gently to separate. When the water returns to a boil and the spaetzle rise to the surface, remove with slotted spoon, let drain for a few seconds, then place in a serving bowl. Place bowl in a 180 degree oven to keep warm. Repeat cooking process until dough has been used. Top finished spaetzle with toasted, buttered bread crumbs for a nice crunch.

Bill's Wine Picks

At a recent dinner with friends, we preferred the Riesling Kabinett and Spätburgunder for overall quality and sweetness level. Here are some good German wines that are locally available, with suggested retail prices:

German Whites

Listed in order from dry to sweet

Ress Kabinett Riesling	\$13
Fitz-Ritter Gewürztraminer	\$17
Studert-Prüm Riesling Spätlese	\$20
Dr. Loosen Riesling Auslese	\$37

German Reds

Bretz Dornfelder	\$13
Schäfer Spätburgunder	\$15

Bill Garlough is a Level 1 Master Sommelier and an owner of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the U.S. Chamber's 2007 Small Business of the Year award. Bill can be reached at www.mychef.com or wineparings@mychef.com.