

# PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



## November 2012 – Food & Wine Gift Giving

Wine and food make great gifts because they can be consumed and don't clutter up the house. I like to offer a gift of wine or food in a pretty bag with a bow so the gift-receiver is welcome to serve it or save it.

When deciding on what wine to give, seek out varietals that pair with the most food. The first wine that comes to mind is off-dry German Riesling. In fact, Riesling pairs with more types of food than any other wine. Surprised? You shouldn't be. German Riesling grapes are grown in some of the coldest, steepest vineyards on earth. The cold temperatures maintain searing acidity and the angle of sun exposure provides maximum ripeness. This creates a wine with intense aromas and flavors as well as mouth-watering acidity. Off-dry Rieslings generally work with anything spicy or acidic and even many desserts. It is a white wine with enough punch to stand up to Mongolian Beef.

If red wine is your preferred choice, consider a Pinot Noir. The movie "Sideways" made it popular, but sommeliers have known for years that Pinot Noir is a red wine that walks the line between delicate seafood and beefy rib-eye. I have even had it with strawberry ice-cream and was pleasantly surprised. What makes Pinot Noir such a great wine for food? First, it is the acidity. Many delicious foods are high in acid (tomatoes for instance). If the wine doesn't have enough acid, it tastes flat next to the food. Second, Pinot Noirs usually have soft tannins as compared to other red wines. Bold tannins make anything spicy taste like a four-alarm fire in your mouth. Third, Pinot Noirs are usually made with a restrained use of oak. Oak creates interest and complexity in wine, however, too much oak and you can forget about tasting the

food, all you taste is oak. Look to Oregon, Mendocino and the Santa Rita Hills for quality, well-priced Pinot Noir.

As for gift foods, spiced nuts are my favorite. They are versatile because they can be served before or after dinner. They make a great snack and keep for quite some time in the fridge. Here is a tasty recipe that has just the right amount of sweet, spicy and savory. Bonus... they pair well with both Riesling and Pinot Noir.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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## Spiced Nuts

### INGREDIENTS

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
4 cups unsalted mixed nuts, such as walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, and almonds  
4 tablespoons unsalted butter  
6 tablespoons brown sugar  
1 teaspoon salt

### DIRECTIONS

Mix spices and reserve. Heat the nuts in a dry skillet and cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to toast, about 4 minutes. Add the butter and cook, stirring, until the nuts begin to darken, about 1 minute. Add the spices, the sugar, 1 tablespoon water, and the salt and cook, stirring, until the sauce thickens and the nuts are glazed, about 5 minutes.

Remove the nuts from the heat and transfer to a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil, separating them with a fork. Let the nuts

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stand until cooled and the sugar has hardened, about 10 minutes. Store in an airtight container.

Yield: 4 cups