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A PERFECT COUPLE: WINE AND CHEESE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Some couples are meant to be together. They bring out the best in each other, even though each one has so much to offer independently, and they're the life of every party.

"Wine and cheese are just such a couple," says Tammy Algood, who creates recipes for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's "Pick Tennessee Products" campaign. Pick Tennessee Products is Tennessee's statewide campaign to identify and promote locally grown or processed foods.

"After the holidays, which usually include a parade of heavy meals with many obligatory, time-consuming dishes, most of us are relieved to be through with celebrating for a while," says Algood. "That's really too bad, because it's actually after the holidays, when cold weather forces us indoors and the days are at their shortest, that most of could use some cheery company."

"A wine and cheese tasting is a great fit for this time of year," says Algood. "It's the least complicated, easiest spread you'll ever place before guests. Once you've set out all your wines and cheeses in a place within easy reach of your tasters, all the work is done. Everyone is free to enjoy each other's company, with no agenda to follow. Just be sure to have enough plain French bread on hand to give everyone's taste buds a bit of a buffer between tastes."

Preparing for a wine tasting party is also more fun than typical party preparations, notes Algood, in that it involves tasting a number of wines well in advance. "Even though discovery and experimentation are part of the fun at a wine and cheese party," says Algood, "you want to be sure you are offering some pairings you already know are matches made in heaven."

Choosing Tennessee wines for a tasting provides a local theme and makes wine selection less daunting than trying to choose only a few bottles from the thousands of wines currently on the market. Try to select no more than four or five wines, and stay in the same color family, meaning white wines or reds, advises Algood. "Otherwise, if you get

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too many wines and too many different flavors, it becomes difficult for your palate to process it all.”

When selecting cheeses for the event, Algood says, “Go out on a limb! Head to the supermarket deli and look for cheeses you don’t normally use at mealtimes. The typical supermarket has literally dozens to choose from. I like to have a mixture of hard and soft cheeses.”

Many Tennessee wineries carry local Tennessee cheeses, like Sweetwater Valley cheddars, which can also be found with other local cheeses through the online store at www.picktnproducts.org.

Once the deck is stacked with some pre-determined wines and cheese partnerships, Algood emphasizes that the point is to have fun trying lots of combinations at the party. “There is no right or wrong way to taste,” says Algood. “Some people prefer to stick to one wine and taste all the cheeses with that one wine. Others will take one cheese and taste it with all the different wines. The object of this party game is to notice if your experience of a wine changes as you try it with the various cheeses... good or bad.”

For beginners, Algood offers some recommendations sure to please tasters while also providing a virtual tour of Tennessee’s varied wineries. “Try a Tennessee Chardonnay or Chardonnay with an English cheese called Wensleydale; try either the cranberry infused style or the version with caramelized onions. Champagne lovers can place a Gouda or Brie beside Beachaven, Stonehaus or Beans Creek Champagne style wines.”

For those who prefer reds, Algood suggests dry reds with cheeses like Havarti and Camembert. “Ports will match well with any type of blue cheese, like Roquefort,” says Algood, “and if you want to include a Tennessee blush, be sure you also include a cheese like fresh mozzarella.”

“Invite wine and cheese to your next party,” says Algood, “and you’ll keep them at the top of your guest list all winter.” For more wine and cheese pairing recommendations using Tennessee wines, or for a directory of Tennessee wineries, visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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