

Wine expert chooses the best-priced bottles for Valentine's Day feasts

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Maybe you can't afford champagne, but you can still toast your sweetheart with a wallet-friendly wine on Valentine's Day.

"People are really conscious of their finances right now so it's good news that you can get a great wine for under \$15," says [Andrew McNamara](#), wine department chairman at the brand-new [Professional Culinary Institute](#) in [Orlando](#). "If you choose carefully, you don't have to spend \$40 or more on a bottle."

McNamara, who supervises the school's highly regarded Certified Sommelier program, says one Valentine's Day dilemma is what wine to serve with chocolate.

"Wine really goes better with dark chocolate than milk chocolate," he says. "Port is traditional, but it can be very costly. I'd go with a rose cava, which costs anywhere from \$8 to \$15 and is delicious with chocolate soufflé and raspberries."

Here are some other recession-proof bottles to choose for your sweetheart.

If you're cooking steak or duck, opt for a domestic wine such as Mirabelle by Schramsberg Brut Rosé, [California](#), Non-Vintage. At around \$20 a bottle, it's a fabulous bubbly made in the same method as true Champagne, but at a much lower price, McNamara says. It's dry with notes of Bing cherry, strawberry and a hint of brioche, and also goes with a dessert such as fresh berries.

If you're cooking seafood for Valentine's Day, choose a 2005 Gramona Gran Cuvée Cava, from [Spain](#), for \$17. It's a great, clean, dry wine with citrus and hazelnut notes, and it's excellent with all fish entrees, McNamara says.

For pasta, a fabulous wine from [Italy](#) costs only about \$9. It's the Mionetto Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Non-Vintage, it is made from the Prosecco grape, is slightly sweet, and has apple and citrus notes. Great with delicate fish and especially pasta with a white wine sauce.

Serving chicken? Worth searching out to serve with it is the 2007 Château Paradis Rosé Terre des Anges, Coteaux d'[Aix en Provence](#). The French wine, priced at around \$15, is a dry rose that has hints of rose petals, cranberries, red currants and strawberries.

For pasta or veal, the \$17 2007 Iron Horse Rosé de Pinot Noir from California, McNamara says. It's dry, with flavors of strawberry, raspberry, rose petal and cranberry.

Finally, if you'd like to splurge on a really good dessert wine, McNamara recommends a 2007 Giacomo Bologna Braida Brachetto d'Acqui from Italy. This slightly sparkling red wine, which goes well with berries and chocolate, has notes of ripe strawberries, raspberries and plums. A half bottle is \$13 and a full bottle is \$24. With a heart-shaped dark chocolate torte, it's a great finale to a Valentine's night feast.