

WHEN PREPARING for Yom Haatzmaut, don't forget the wine. Yarden is always a good choice. (Golan Heights Winery)



EAT DRINK & BE MERRY



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

'Eat Drink and Be Merry....for tomorrow we may die." Whether this important saying comes from the Hittites or Isaiah, this is what I think of when I am out and about on *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, Israel Independence Day, which should really be known as "National Mangal Day." The word *mangal* is the slang for the Israeli barbecue.

Israelis have always had a love affair with grilled meat. Once it was just the *al ha'esh* (on the grill) restaurants at petrol stations. Then the Hilton Tel Aviv opened a fine dining restaurant that was called The Hilton Grill Room, where you could receive posh grilled food and pay for the quality address. However on Yom Ha'atzma'ut, it all goes native and do it yourself. You would even know which day it was if you were a blind hermit, because someone will be barbecuing near you. If you live in an apartment, you can be kippered, because one of your neighbors will be lighting up their grill on their balcony. The initial smells

are not so good, being generally of lighter fuel, but later on more enticing smoky flavors, will float and encompass your private space, involving you in their aromas, whether you like it or not.

National parks will be crisscrossed with families with picnic baskets and their steaks and kebabs. Like a patchwork quilt, the ground will be covered. I have even seen families taking up the space on a tiny roundabout surrounded by busy traffic!

All you need is the cheapest metal grill, barely big enough to put two generous sized steaks on at the same time. These are available at any petrol station, and if you have one, then you are in business. You can squeeze into any space and begin cooking. Others will come prepared as though for a military campaign. They will bring picnic tables, beach chairs and a large mat to lie in. Whatever the scale of the enterprise, men can be seen fanning the grill with great fervor and earnestness. With lines of sweat under their man boobs, and stomachs hanging over the belt of their shorts, they will be fanning non-stop, whatever the circumstance. Whether there are flames, a wisp of smoke or no action at all, it does not take away from the serious-

ness of this action. They will use something small, like the cardboard flap of a case of wine for this important ritual.

The wives, having worked all morning preparing salads and packing the picnic, will be ignoring this 'man dance.' They will be sitting with their oversized designer sunglasses and newly painted nails, chilled out, ignoring it all, whilst talking to their friends. The cooking is a 'men only' pursuit. The kids with spiky gelled hair will be going wild, shrieking in their excitement, but will be ignored by their absorbed parents. Then the food is ready. It could be *pargiyot* (boneless and skinless chicken thighs), *shishlik* (skewered cubes of meat), kebab (rolled ground meat) or steak, with pita, grilled vegetables, humus and tehina and salad. The food 'fress' fest is underway. Whether you are starving, slightly peckish or not hungry at all, you eat as though there is no tomorrow and feel stuffed for hours, nay, days after.

What you eat on National Mangal Day depends on your family roots and your own customs and traditions. What you drink is where I come in. No doubt, the best accompaniment to a barbecue is beer. You buy



YIRON, GALIL Mountain Winery's flagship wine, offers particularly good value. (Galil Mountain Winery)

what you like at a promotion price in your supermarket and it is all very simple. If you prefer beer, I will not dissuade you. My favorite of the large brands here is Goldstar, anything from Jems or Alexander from the smaller local breweries and Samuel Adams of the imports. I have recently sampled Krombacher, which is refreshing in the Pilsener style. My personal poison is IPA in the British style. My first job in the UK was with Bass Charrington, so I was weaned on Bass Ale and Charrington IPA. Above all though, I covet Guinness. I am a true devotee.

IF YOU want wine, then it gets complicated. You Google wine for barbecues, and you will be given suggestions for not only matching wine with every meat, fish or vegetable, but also for every sauce, herb and spice. It is really a load of guff, because you need a drinking wine. You are not going to buy a different wine for everything you are going to grill. So the first thing is to relax. What the occasion calls for is a mood wine. You take into account the weather, your budget and what you like and that is it. To make it easier, I will give you my personal choice for the Israeli barbecue, but do not expect it to be sophisticated.

White Wine or Rose: I suggest you choose a dry white wine or rose for starters. My choice of white wine would be Sauvignon Blanc. It is very dry, with a tropical fruit or grassy aroma, and a very refreshing acidity. It has a herbaceous quality that can match well with the sweetness of grilled vegetables and the acidity to cut the marinades, sauces and smoky flavors. Which wine to buy depends on the company you keep wine-wise. The Barkan Classic Sauvignon Blanc, Tabor Adama Sauvignon Blanc, Dalton Estate Fume Blanc and Yarden Sauvignon Blanc are recommended at their different price points. If you want to go to New Zealand, Mud House is the best value, and is also available in kosher and non-kosher versions.

If you want your dry wine to be a pretty pink color, and to go with everything, then choose a rose. It is



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somehow the right style of wine for a barbecue, fitting the atmosphere of informality, the Mediterranean climate and it will appeal to a wide range of people. The best roses come from Provence in France. There are some great choices in wine stores, including kosher ones like Mas de la Source Rose and Les Jamelles Rose in some supermarkets. Or you can go Israeli. The Barkan Gold Reserve Rose and Teperberg Essence Rose are both good at different prices.

Semi-Dry, Sweet or Sparkling: Anyone who wants semi-dry, should go for it without thinking twice. These are wines, as the name suggests, which are not totally dry, but with a pleasing sweetness. However, they also have a balancing acidity if well made. The Tabor Har Gewurztraminer, Carmel 2 Vats White and Lueria Gewurztraminer are wines that will fit the bill. The most well-known semi-dry wine is, in fact, semi-sweet. This is Blue Nun (aka Blue Wine in supermarkets), a brand founded by a Jewish family.

If you prefer sweet, go with Moscato. This is made from the Muscat grape in the style of Moscato d'Asti in Italy. It is lightly sparkling, low alcohol (closer to beer than table wine), with the familiar Muscat aroma, a grapey taste and it is sweet, but less so than most dessert wines. Served ice cold, it is a fun wine for a picnic. Those not sure about wine will like it, and it will make the wine snob smile. The usual suspects are Mount Hermon, Teperberg and Hayotzer. All are good. The real McCoy is the Bartenura Moscato in the blue bottle, from the beautiful Asti region in Piedmont, Italy. The Bartenura also comes in a can, which is perfect for a picnic. Moscato is the unselfish 'family' purchase and an alternative to the semi-dry wines.

If you buy a sparkling wine for those wanting some sweetness, go for a Lambrusco. It is a wine that comes from Emilia Romagna in northeastern Italy. Lambrusco is frizzante, slightly sparkling. Here they are normally semi-dry, simple and inexpensive. The rosso or red has sour cherry and strawberry aromas. They are fun wines. They will complement the sweetness or contrast the spiciness of the sauces and marinades. Of those here in Israel, Giacobazzi is a good as any. Women love Lambrusco, my late wife included. Just remember to take the better sex into account with

your wine purchases. Wine is not limited to just dry wines with a long tasting note. If you are a wine snob, with a serious demeanor, just allow yourself to enjoy it without feeling you have to judge it. It is a 'drinking wine', with a smile on its face.

Red Wine: Regarding red wines, I don't feel big oaky, tannic, concentrated, complex reds fit the bill, even if they in theory match the specific meat served. I think we are looking for medium bodied wines that have lashings of fruit, a chewy and meaty flavor, and a focused finish. My choice is a Shiraz (aka Syrah), which fits this description. Some particularly good ones within their different price points are Zion Estate Shiraz, Private Collection Shiraz, Recanati Syrah, Gamla Syrah and Jerusalem Wineries Windmill Shiraz. Blends including Shiraz will also be good. Examples like Domaine Netofa Red and Maia Mare Nostrum are beautifully flavorful Mediterranean blends. The southern Rhone is a good place for blends including Syrah. The Vidal Fleury GSM is excellent and a great value. If you need kosher, then the Domaine de Cristia Cotes du Rhone is an option.

Preparing for a picnic or barbecue, put your white and sparkling wines in the fridge four hours before you need them. If you have not prepared in advance, then put them in the freezer, but don't forget them. If you have a bottle of wine that you have forgotten to chill, wrap the bottle in a wet newspaper and hold it (carefully) outside the car window as the car is driving (not the driver obviously!). Never be afraid to serve reds chilled. This is ok for a picnic. They will warm up soon enough! I am fine with drinking wine in plastic cups, but there is now glassware for wine without stems. There are also some quality plastic bowl tasting glasses without a stem. These are perfect for a picnic.

Perhaps the sagest advice of how to enjoy yourself on Yom Ha'atzma'ut was found on a 6th century BCE wine chalice discovered in Cyprus. Inscribed on it are the following words, which are simple, clear and to the point: "Be Happy, Drink Well." Happy 73rd Israel Independence Day!

The writer is a wine trade veteran who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is referred to as 'the English voice of Israeli wine.' www.adammontefiore.com