

Merlot



5 Things You Need To Know

1. **Basics:**

Merlot is the most widely planted red grape in France's Bordeaux region. Although sometimes eclipsed in prestige by cabernet sauvignon, the grape with which it is routinely blended, it nevertheless is a highly sought after and probably one of the best known varietal wines in the world. In recent years, Merlot has enjoyed an explosion in popularity in the United States and in particular Washington State where Merlot has become one of the state's winemaking trademarks. In California, plantings have risen from 4,000 acres in 1988 to over 50,000 today. Acreage in Washington is nearly 6,000 acres. Well known French Merlot include Chateau Petrus and Pomerol from Bordeaux, Duckhorn from Napa Valley and Leonetti, L'ecole and Woodward Canyon from Washington state. Other familiar names you

will see on LCB store shelves are Red Diamond, Sterling, Kendall Jackson and Hogue.

Merlot ripens earlier in the season than cabernet sauvignon. It is more adaptable to cool climates than cabernet sauvignon, but similarly prefers a relatively warm growing environment.

Domestically, California is by far the largest producer of premium Merlot, but the savvy domestic wine drinker is very familiar with Washington Merlot along with others from the southern hemisphere regions of Argentina and Australia.

As with nearly every other varietal wine these days, price ranges run from the very reasonable \$5-7 price range on upwards. Washington state stores offer nearly 70 different Merlot and Merlot blends to the customer.

2. What's it taste like?



Merlot is often described as jammy or ripe with forward appealing fruit flavors. Not to be confused with sweet, its flavor is simply seen as a softer type of red. You will find a wide variety in tastes of Merlot depending on where it comes from and the winemakers preferred style. Merlot's popularity is partly due in fact that it is softer and fruitier, (some would say "more approachable") than cabernet sauvignon, yet displays many of the same aromas and flavors – black cherry, berry, currant, cedar, and possibly green olive – along with mint, tobacco and tea-leaf tones. Tea leaf?!?

3. What's it go with?



Like Cabernet, Merlot is a good accompaniment to simply prepared beef and lamb dishes (nothing better than a T-bone and a big glass of Merlot!). Traditionally reds are paired with hearty dishes such as stews, beef, but Merlot is also well known for its soft quality, is enjoyed alone or with simple appetizers such as mild cheese and breads.

As the sales person, you should be able to recommend at least three options in your store at various price points based on the customers requests (dinner, before dinner, etc.) Possible selection is only limited by the stores inventory.

- 🍷 Dry red wines (including Merlot) are good pairings with most red meats and pasta dishes. Some styles, those a bit more fruit forward can be a versatile choice with or without food.***
- 🍷 Merlot is a perfect dry red for those just venturing into red wines and perfect for a summer grilling season wine.***
- 🍷 Some cheeses that merlot pairs well with would include bleu, sharp cheddar or Swiss.***
- 🍷 Experiment - try a couple different Merlots with friends, that's half the fun.***

4. Merlot in LCB Stores-by the numbers

Nearly half of all Washington red wine sold in 750 ml bottles in Washington state stores is labeled either Merlot or Merlot Blend.

-  There are currently 67 listed Merlots available for purchase in state stores.**
-  In state stores, Merlot is typically set on the shelf by region then by price with the more expensive brands and labels near the top of the shelf. Imports, larger bottles and boxes are set by brand.**

5. Category Leaders

In Washington state stores the best sellers in the Merlot category are (by region and size):

Washington

-  Red Diamond**
-  Columbia Crest Grand Estate**
-  Columbia Crest Two Vines**
-  Chateau Ste Michelle**
-  Sagelands**

California

-  Barefoot**
-  Pepperwood Grove**

Imports

- Jacobs Creek**
- Yellow Tail**
- Walnut Crest**

Large Sized

- *Nathanson Creek (CA)*
- *Stimson Estate (WA)*
- *Casarsa (Italy)*
- *Gallo (CA)*
- *Mondavi Woodbridge(CA)*

There are many other Merlot labels from different parts of the world available in state stores, grocery and wine stores. Get to know some of them take a look at the labels, do some investigating, the payoff in your ability to better serve your customer will be tremendous...