



Pairing Beer with Food

Have you ever considered pairing beer with the different courses of a meal, just like diners do with wine? Beer has been around for a long time, probably thousands of years, and there is a huge variety of beer to pair with just about any food. As a beverage, beer is sort of a catch-all term to describe the wide array of fermented mixtures of grain and yeast. Beer is divided into two main groups, ales and lagers. Each has its own characteristics that make it ideal for different food groups.

Ales are “top fermented” because the yeast rises to the top of the fermenting vat as it converts the grain sugars into alcohol. Hops were originally added to help preserve the ale and to give it a little more flavor. As a general rule, ales are floral or fruity smelling and tasting, have a bit more bitterness from the hops, and can be served at warmer temperatures.

Lagers are “bottom fermented” because the yeast sinks to the bottom of the fermenting vat as it works to make alcohol from the grain sugars. Lagers are usually made at lower temperatures than ales and often are sweeter in taste. Most mass marketed beer in the United States is a lager in the Pilsner style.

For pairing beer with food, it might be fun to think outside the box of beer and pizza or beer and chips. With the large number of domestic and imported beers, and mass produced and marketed beer to boutique and microbrews, a consumer can find any kind of beer to suit their dining experience.

Here are some suggestions: For before a meal with appetizers try a Pilsner Urquell (original Pilsner) from Czechoslovakia, a Lambic (fruit flavored, high alcohol) or Trappist Ale from Belgium.

Salad courses are hard to pair with beverages because of the vinegar in most dressings. One possibility might be a pale lagered beer (example: Sam Adams Boston Lager).

For main entrees there is a huge range of beer to consider. For red meats, such as beef and game, pale ales, India pale ales are considerations. Bock beer, Marzen and Oktoberfest beers, Vienna style lagers (Example: Dos Equis) all go well with spicy foods. Poultry such as chicken and turkey pair well with pale lagers, Munich style beers, Vienna style beers and other dry ales. With pasta dishes try Munich style beers, either dark or pale or other dark lagers. Fish and shellfish go well with Porters, Stouts, and pale ales, but for fish fresh from a Minnesota lake or river, nothing beats a good American Pilsner. Pork pairs best with something slightly sweet and malty like an Oktoberfest or Bock.

If you are going to be fancy and include a cheese course in your meal, beers that pair well with cheese are pale ales, Lambics, and India pale ale.

For dessert think either white or very dark beers like: Belgian white beer, Scotch ales or brown ales.

Serving size should be 2-3 ounces per course to begin with. After all, the host or hostess wants their guests to taste the results of their hard work. Glassware is not really critical, but four ounce wine or juice glasses work very well. Save the larger Pilsner glasses and mugs or magnum wine glasses for another occasion. As far as temperature to serve the beer a good rule of thumb is “the lighter the beer, the colder it should be.” American style beers and other lagers would be chilled the coldest and ales and stouts would be served the warmest. Some stouts can even be served at room temperature. Color is also a good guide. Light colored beer is served colder than dark colored beer.

If you think that a multi-course meal with beer sounds like fun, stop in at **Aurora Wines and Spirits** to browse our large selection of beers, including imports and microbrews. Don't know what you want? Ask any of our staff to help you with your choices, or take advantage of our mixed six pack to try a variety of beers before purchasing a larger amount.