

# THE ENTH DEGREE

## GOURMET ON A BUDGET | Ted Allen's tips for low-cost, high impact entertaining.



Entertaining guru Ted Allen hosts both *Chopped* and *Food Detectives* on The Food Network. He also serves as the spokesperson for Robert Mondavi Private Selection wines. We asked the go-to party guy to share a few tips for pulling off a recession-era soiree that's more chic than chintzy:

**Mix up pitchers of frugal yet festive Sangria:** This crowd-pleasing Spanish sipper packs enough of a punch that guests won't miss a costly full bar. And rather than meekly apologizing for the lack of liquid options, Allen suggests boldly declaring "Sangria night" as a theme and just running with it. He prefers starting with a full-bodied red like Zinfandel or Cabernet, and then adding Cointreau or Triple Sec, Brandy and slices of fresh fruit. For a lighter version, pour Pinot Grigio or oaky Chardonnay.

**Savor wallet-friendly flavor:** Allen loves the flavor (and versatility) of dried beans. For a quick and easy casual dinner, place unsoaked black beans in a pressure cooker for fifteen minutes, and then mix them with rice, cilantro and chopped tomatoes. If you would rather serve a meaty main course, choose hangar steak or flank steak. These chef-preferred cuts are a delicious steal—just remember to marinate them for a day or two to make them super tender. As Allen points out, not even the toniest of affairs requires lobster or filet—the best wedding he ever attended was a pig roast. It's about the taste, not the price tag.

**Embrace the casserole dish:** There's no shame in potluck, Allen says. Especially for holiday gatherings, it gives guests an opportunity to sample other families' classics traditions. Dividing the cooking duties also means sharing the grocery expenses—a win-win situation.

**Think outside the vase:** Since food itself can be visually striking, use bowls filled with lemons or apples instead of pricey floral bouquets. If you do opt for stems, use a simple arrangement of one color of flowers, thoughtfully cut so everyone can see over them. Even better, create groupings of natural elements that reflect the current season—sticks you pick in late fall or winter, wildflowers in the early days of summer.

—KELLY MAGYARICS

## WINE & CHEESE PAIRING 101

Wine and cheese traditionally pair like peanut butter and jelly, but not all wines and not all cheeses taste great together. To ensure the wines and the cheeses you taste actually pair well, try these five tips:

If you order a cheese plate or are unfamiliar with the cheeses being served, drink a Riesling, the go-to-wine for cheeses.

If Riesling isn't your wine of choice, go with a sparkling. The bubbles in bubbly cleanse your palate from the creamy excess, and they're absolutely exceptional with bloomy rinds like Brie.

If you order a wine flight or are unfamiliar with the wines being served, order a Parmigiano-Reggiano; it's strong enough to stand up to most reds, but it's not overbearing for most whites.

Tannins tend to clash with most things dairy so white wines tend to pair better overall with cheese, but if you've just got to have some Cabernet with your curds, grind some fresh pepper on top of the cheese. The pepper will make the flavors of the cheese and the wine sing together in perfect harmony.

Pair the condiment—the jam, the chutney, the honey—with the wine, not the cheese. Condiments, pepper included, tie the two together, especially if you choose a wine with aromas that match the condiment (apple butter over cheddar with a Chenin Blanc that boasts apple aromas, for example).

—JEANETTE HURT

PHOTO TOP: STEPHEN SULLIVAN OF EPICURIOUS