

# FIVE STEPS TO PUDDING PERFECTION

Make the pud the star of your Christmas with these serving and tasting tips

1 **Steam rather than microwave.**

Yes, microwaving is quicker, but our experts assured us you'll get a much better taste from steaming (instructions should be on the packet). Plus, it's practically impossible to overcook it this way. Just keep an eye on the water level to prevent it from drying up.



4 **Slurp something spicy.**

Pair your pudding with a drink that has a bit of spice, such as ginger wine or ginger beer. If you prefer fizz, a sweet Asti Spumante works well. Don't forget about coffee, either. Our experts suggest that Irish coffee or espresso martini are perfect partners.



2 **Top with Drambuie cream.**

Forgo your usual brandy butter and try Drambuie cream instead. Just add one or two dessert spoons per 100ml of double cream. For a non-alcoholic cream with a twist, add a few drops of vanilla or orange extract instead.



3 **Pretty-up your pud.**

A flaming brandied pud is showstopping, but why not try topping it with a sprinkling of icing sugar and spices, such as cinnamon or nutmeg? Or have a bit of fun with gold sugar pearl sprinkles (from the baking aisle). Poking Christmas biscuits into the top is kitsch but kids will love it.

5 **Turn leftovers into liqueur**

Ever wondered what happens to the leftovers from our taste tests? They turn into Christmas pudding vodka liqueur. Combine one third of a bottle of pudding crumbs with two thirds vodka (or you could try a liqueur such as Southern Comfort), pop into storage for a couple of months, then strain through a muslin. Both are delicious.

# Best red wines for winter

Our selection of affordable reds, nominated by supermarkets, will stand you in good stead when friends and guests drop round

BEST BUY

**SAINSBURY'S TASTE THE DIFFERENCE RIOJA RESERVA 78% £9**

This Spanish red was a step above the rest and a real people-pleaser. It's well-aged, fragrant with spice and has a sustained body without any overbearing tannins. Our experts said it will pair beautifully with roast lamb, or even with turkey and trimmings. (V, Ve)

BEST BUY

**M&S TAPA ROJA OLD VINES MONASTRELL 2018 77% £7**  
Our experts thought this wine would be great for parties as it had a generous serving of juicy berries and a dry finish. It's a 'sexy' Spanish red that can be enjoyed with a range of foods, from pizza to chargrilled beef or mushrooms, and from Cheddar to steak & ale pie. (V, Ve)

BEST BUY

**CO-OP IRRESISTIBLE ORGANIC FAIRTRADE MALBEC 77% £7.50**  
This Chilean red was charming and very 'gluggable' – making it great, if dangerous, for a party. It's bright, fresh and not overly tannic, but some found it too sweet. It would go well with a herby shoulder of lamb or mushroom risotto, as well as a meaty winter stew. (V, Ve)

 <p><b>ICELAND RABO DE GALO 2018 74% £6</b> A great bargain. This Portugese red had a succulent, warm ripeness to it that would go well with roast pork, sausages or sticky ribs, and will hold its own against punchy tomato pasta dishes. (V, Ve)</p>	 <p><b>LIDL COONAWARRA CABERNET SAUVIGNON 74% £6</b> This Australian is made for easy drinking, with overtones of jammy blackberry (one expert compared it to Ribena). It could be great for Christmas too, with goose or turkey.</p>	 <p><b>SPAR RIOS DE LOS ANDES MALBEC RESERVE 74% £8</b> This straightforward Argentinian wine slightly split the panel. Some found it subtle, others found it punchy, bright, even aggressively oaky. Ideal for grilled steak or mushrooms. (V, Ve)</p>	 <p><b>ASDA EXTRA SPECIAL YARRA VALLEY PINOT NOIR 72% £8</b> Our experts agreed that this was a middle-of-the-road red. It had a light touch of berries, albeit a little thin with not too much going on. But it could be good for turkey or duck.</p>
 <p><b>TESCO FINEST MONTAGNE ST EMILION 2018 72% £9</b> The only French red in our line-up, this didn't really have enough fruit to balance the strong oak flavours. But it could pair well with beef stew or roast vegetables. (V, Ve)</p>	 <p><b>MORRISONS THE BEST CÔTES CATALANES 71% £7.75</b> Another one that really split the panel. Although it's a good chunky winter red, some detected a 'hot-water bottle' smell. So it could benefit from decanting before you drink it. (V, Ve)</p>	 <p><b>ALDI TORO LOCO RESERVA 69% £5.50</b> Our experts described this as mellow and slightly sweet, but also lacking in character. But this Spanish red will be acceptable for parties – especially if you don't want to spend too much. (V, Ve)</p>	 <p><b>WAITROSE ROMANIAN PINOT NOIR 67% £6</b> This pale red was a step below the others. Some liked the dried-herb and red-fruit notes, but others found it nondescript and lacking the real bite needed for winter. (V, Ve)</p>

LOW & NO ALCOHOL

Low-alcohol wines are often disappointing and are almost always overly sweet to compensate. Good examples will manage to balance this with a decent level of acidity – look out for whites made from riesling or muscat grapes. For something less sweet but with no alcohol, try a flavoured tonic with a no-alcohol spirit, such as Seedlip.

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