

Light-bodied Italian red wines: 10 top bottles worth seeking out

Italy's varied climate and geography means it can produce wines in myriad styles so as well as racy whites and full-bodied reds Italy is home to an array of light-bodied reds too - perfect for summer drinking. Here are ten of the best.



In a country famous for its rich variety of native grapes, Italy has a wine for every occasion. When it comes to light-bodied reds you can find easy-drinking, perfumed reds from the north in Lombardy and Trentino all the way down to Sicily at the toe of the country. Writing for Decanter about southern Italy's native grapes Susan Hulme MW highlights two varieties known for producing superb light-bodied reds. Piediroso is the second most-planted variety in Campania, says Hulme, but it is little-known as it's usually blended with other varieties. 'It produces lightly coloured red wines with crunchy red-berry fruits, green herbal or olive notes, light tannins, and moderate acidity,' she says, likening it to Sicily's Frappato which is another grape known for its fresh, light touch. Frappato is one of Sicily's oldest varieties, cultivated in a small area between Vittoria and Siracusa, says Hulme. 'I have been impressed by single-varietal Frappato wines I have tasted for the sheer pleasure and enjoyment they provide: they are light, fruity, amenable wines with a delightful aroma and flavours of fresh strawberries and herbs.' Further north you can find one of Italy's most famous wines Lambrusco, the lightly sparkling red wine from Emilia-Romagna. 'Lambruscos are finally shedding the stigma of their cheap and cheerful predecessors thanks to a new wave of small, independent wineries that are exploring the full potential of this ancient family of grapes,' says Sarah Lane, in her food and wine tour of Emilia Romagna and Lombardy for Decanter. Known for their light, fresh – often spicy – style Lambrusco is the perfect summer serve. Other red grapes producing wines which happily fall into the 'quaffable summer drinking' category include Pinot Noir (often labelled Pinot Nero in Italy), Schiava, Dolcetto and Chiavennasca. The last one may sound unfamiliar but it's actually the name given to Nebbiolo in the Alpine region of Valtellina in the very north of the country. Here the Nebbiolo grape can be made into an elegant, delicate and creamy wine.

Chilling

Many of these light-bodied reds will benefit from a blast of chilling before being served, especially in the summer months. 'Good summer reds should be served at 10°C-16°C (50°F-60°F)' wrote Peter Richards MW, in his tasting of lighter summer wines for Decanter last year. 'That's significantly cooler than many a summer's day, so don't be afraid to pop them in the fridge for 30 minutes before serving if the weather's warm.'

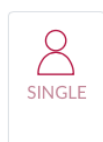
If you're entertaining Matt Walls suggests placing the bottle in an ice bucket filled with ice and some water for about 10-15 minutes. 'Do take regular sips to make sure you're not over-chilling the wine,' he says. 'If you're in a hurry, 8-10 minutes in the freezer will suffice, but more gentle methods are preferable.'

Whether you chill or not, there are plenty of great options here to explore.

10 light-bodied Italian red wines to try

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Passopisciaro,
Passorosso, Etna,
Sicily 2016



Tasted by **Andy Howard MW** (at Food-friendly wines from around Italy tasting, 15 Dec 2020)

Part of **Light-bodied Italian red wines: 10 top bottles worth seeking out**



From 70- to 100-year-old vines on the volcanic slopes of Etna between 500m-1,100m, this is a typical Nerello Mascalese; an ethereal, thinker's wine. There's firmness on the palate, allied to lively acidity and a lingering, mineral finish, together with floral red fruits on the nose. Deceptively light in appearance, this has the structure to be a fine accompaniment to slow-cooked lamb, or robust fish such as roast turbot or halibut.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2026



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