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What Can I Drink at Thanksgiving Besides Wine?

BY ERIC ASIMOV



Andrew Scrivani for The New York Times The Reanimator, made of rye whiskey and lighter Italian amaro, like Nonino, can help to counter that overstuffed feeling.

Personally, I would prefer not to wait until the after-dinner drink for something a little stronger. Hard ciders come in an almost bewildering array of styles, but most are about 5 to 8 percent alcohol, around the strength of lager beers. Many ciders, particularly the American brands, are a little too sweet for my taste. For Thanksgiving, the drier the better. [West County](#) in the Berkshires makes excellent ciders from a wide range of heritage apples. I especially like the tart, rich cider made from the Redfield. I also like the ciders from [Farnum Hill](#), especially the fresh, earthy Extra Dry.

If buying American is not essential, my top cider choice would be the Etienne Dupont Cidre Bouché, which is widely sold. The Dupont ciders, from Normandy, are vintage dated. The 2010 is subtle, dry and refreshing, with a suggestion of caramel and an attractive funk.

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Q. Every year you answer the same questions about which wines — to drink with the Thanksgiving feast. Well, I don't want to drink wine. What else can I serve with the meal?

A. Water? No, I'm joking. While I personally would always — choose to drink wine at Thanksgiving, you also have a universe of wonderful alternatives. Let's start with that emblem of fall, the apple.

Is there anything more direct and pure than the fresh, sweet-tart flavor of apple cider, the nonalcoholic variety? I don't mean the clear, pallid mass-market juice that passes for cider in supermarkets, but the dark, cloudy, unfiltered cider that tastes as if you've just pulled the best, juiciest, most bracing apple off a tree and crunched into it.

Fresh cider requires the same elements of balance that keep good wine teetering on a fragile point: sweetness of fruit offset by refreshing acidity. It's great before, during and after, especially if you heat it up. With a half-gallon of cider, toss in a couple of cinnamon sticks and some citrus zest. If you want to get fancy, you can wrap cloves and nutmeg in cheesecloth and immerse it in the cider like a teabag. Simmer for 10 minutes or so and you're done. Add rum and you have a hot toddy.

Q. But I want beer. Any thoughts on which brews would go with — the meal?

A. Just about any good craft beers will do nicely, if you want to — know the truth. But here are some specific suggestions.

It's going to be a long, filling day, so I would start the party with beers that will energize the taste buds. Good pilsners snap you to attention with a lively, bracing bitterness. Lagunitas, Lakefront, Victory and Brooklyn all offer good versions, as do Pilsner Urquell and Jever. An alternative might be a Kölsch, a crisp, clean, refreshing German ale, which I love. American versions are hard to find, but Gaffel and Reissdorf from Germany are fairly easy to find.

For the feast itself, you can't go wrong with mildly hoppy pale ales like Flying Dog or Stoudt's. I love porters, easy-drinking dark beers with a tangy malt character. Geary's London Porter is terrific, as is Samuel Smith Taddy Porter from England and Deschutes Black Butte, if you live on the West Coast.

Centoventi anni della Famiglia Nonino

A bolder choice would be a Belgian farmhouse ale like Saison Dupont, an airy, spicy brew that is versatile with foods. Even more intrepid would be sour beers, a somewhat vague category of older styles characterized by great acidity. These would include Belgian lambic beers and especially gueuzes, which are incredibly refreshing and complex, and would go beautifully with the feast, though their unexpectedly pungent flavors can be polarizing. Cantillon Gueuze from Belgium epitomizes this style. By the way, I will have a lot to say about sour beers next week.

Q. What about something with a little more kick to it?

A. Well, if you want to begin your holiday with a cocktail, why not? Mix yourself a dry martini and enjoy. But for the larger crowd, how about a punch, which you can make in quantity, especially if it's not too labor intensive and you can do most of the work in advance?

A [Fish House Punch](#) qualifies nicely and has the added attraction of history, as its invention can be traced back to the 1730s and one of America's oldest men's clubs. I've taken a recipe from "[The Punch Bowl](#)" by Dan Searing (Sterling Epicure, 2011), which has a good balance of sweet and tart flavors. Will it go with the food? After a couple of glasses of punch, you may not care.

Q. What about after the meal?

A. Are you kidding? A pillow will do nicely. But I do recommend one postprandial beverage that is tailor-made for Thanksgiving: amari, the Italian range of digestifs that can do wonders to counter that overstuffed feeling.

[Fernet-Branca](#) is well known, gloriously bitter and surprising refreshing. [Nonino](#) makes a lighter, slightly sweeter amaro that suggested to David Wondrich, the drinks authority, [a cocktail of half amaro and half rye whiskey](#). Sounds ideal after Thanksgiving. Or if needed, simply drink the amaro straight.

DINING & WINE | RECIPE

The Reanimator

1 1/2 ounces straight rye whiskey

1 1/2 ounces lighter Italian amaro, like Nonino

Thin-cut lemon peel, for garnish.

Stir the rye and amaro together with plenty of cracked ice. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Top with the lemon peel.

Yield: One cocktail.