

Pinot grigio • Irene's Burrito Bean Dip

Pinot grigio (pronounced PEE-no GREE-gee-oh) or Pinot gris (pronounced PEE-no GREE) is the second most popular white wine in the nation and one of the most popular white wines in Lodi. The Lodi AVA is the number two producer of Pinot grigio grapes in the nation. Many Lodi wineries make a Pinot grigio or Pinot gris varietal wine. Its popularity is due to its refreshing qualities on a hot summer day that are created by its fruity citrus flavor and moderate acidity. An adult drinking Pinot grigio is akin to a child drinking lemonade. It's a great alternative to Chardonnay for those who want something a little lighter and more flavorful. Pinot grigio's reputation suffered for years due to very cheap, bad tasting wines flooding the market and turning people off. However, Lodi winemakers have applied their grape growing and winemaking skills to turn out some fantastic Pinot grigios at surprisingly low prices.

Origin: Pinot grigio originated in the Burgundy region of France and is thought to be a mutant clone of Pinot noir (the red wine of Burgundy). It found a home in Northern Italy and became the country's most popular "white" grape. Though it's used to make white wine, it's not a white grape. It's actually grayish blue. What's up with that? Well, you probably don't want to hear this, but most wineries make Pinot grigio juice white by adding activated carbon, which strips out most of the color and flavor. During fermentation, the juice is nearly black. The winery filters the carbon particles out, leaving a clear white wine. They do it because customers expect Pinot grigio wine to be clear white. It's a testament to the grape's huge flavor that a wine treated like this still packs quite a punch. Imagine what the wine would taste like without having most of its essence stripped away. Well, you don't have to imagine. Try a Pinot grigio with a touch of color or a Pinot gris rosé. Many of these were either spared from the activated carbon process or were lightly treated.

Tasting and Serving: There are three distinct styles of Pinot grigio wines, depending on where it is made. In Lodi, we like it fruity and dry. The color of Pinot grigio is probably more important than it is for any other white wine. If it's clear white, you know it was treated with activated carbon. A slightly golden color indicates a very light treatment or none at all, so you can expect much more of the grape's flavor. Assuming you have a nice straw yellow to golden wine in your glass, you will get aromas of ripe citrus, apple, and occasionally peach. In your mouth, it tastes tangy, like a sweet grapefruit. Its finish will feel "bright" with a short aftertaste that will cleanse your palate, if you're drinking it with food. Serve Pinot grigio at 50 degrees (30 minutes in a refrigerator).

Pairing: Pinot grigio pairs well with salads, particularly with citrus or vinaigrette dressings. It's also great with raw vegetables, light fish or chicken (especially with lemon or citrus cream), sushi, and tacos with cilantro. I chose Peltier Winery Hybrid 2016 Pinot grigio to pair with Irene's Burrito Bean Dip. This dip has a myriad of flavors, but none are overpowering. The light but noticeable acidity in the wine is a perfect match for the subtle citrus flavor of the avocado sauce and tomato toppings and the vegetable notes of the mild Ortega Anaheim chiles. The fruit in the wine rounds out the mostly savory character of the dish.

The truth be told, I'm not a white wine fan. However, when a friend walked me through Peltier Station Winery many years ago, and I scored a free bottle of their Hybrid Pinot grigio. This wine was so good that it changed my mind about white wines. Rodney Schatz (Junior), a third generation Lodi winegrape grower, grew up in a farming family just down the street from us. He and his wife, Gayla, bought their first 40-acre vineyard in 1985, which is now the site of their winery and estate vineyards. The Schatz family now owns or farms 1,200 acres of grapes in the Lodi area, growing most of the varietals described in this book. Last year, Rod recruited his younger sister, Nina, into the business. You will find her promoting the family's wines in the tasting room or organizing special wine club events.

Irene's Burrito Bean Dip

Now, this one is off the charts! In Lodi, when we're not growing grapes, making wine, or celebrating something, we occasionally watch a sporting event. As far back as I can remember, probably before I could read, I was fooling with old transistor radios trying to tune in ball games for my dad while he was fishing. My mother never missed a San Francisco Giants game. Over the years, as color TV's got bigger and a sporting event became more of an "event," the food got more sophisticated. My landlord, Irene, taught me how to make this dip so that I had something to take to a 1985 Super Bowl party. I lived in Florida at the time, and I was the only 49ers fan in town. I wore my #16 Joe Montana jersey. Though everyone at the party bet me that Miami would win, I came home with an empty wallet, ripped pants, and an empty dish. At least they loved the dip. This cool, rich, creamy, spicy, dip will steal the show at any Super Bowl party or just about any other place you take it.



Irene's Burrito Bean Dip with fresh, sturdy Rancho San Miguel tortilla chips ready to take to my brother's July 4th pool party

Ingredients

1 batch Shortcut Refried Beans, still warm (page 219)
4 Haas avocados
1/2 lemon (or 1 TBS lemon juice)
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper
1-1/2 tsp Old Uncle Lester's Pepper Sauce
8 ounces sour cream
3/4 cup large pitted black olives, sliced into 2 or 3 rounds per olive
2 Roma tomatoes concassée (page 59)
1/2 small yellow onion, cut small dice (about 1/2 cup)
4-ounce can Ortega mild diced green chiles (drained)
6 ounces shredded cheese (Monterey Jack and medium Cheddar or Mexican Blend)

Preparing the Avocado Sauce

Remove the flesh from the avocados into a mixing bowl that is at least twice the volume of the avocado flesh. See my East Lodi Avocado Sauce recipe (page 51) for instructions on how to dice an avocado. Mash and stir the avocado until all the chunks are gone and it is more or less creamy. Squeeze the lemon and add the lemon juice, salt, pepper, and pepper sauce and stir until blended.

Assembling the Dish

Pour the warm bean mix into a 3 quart (9 x 13) rectangular glass baking dish and spread it out evenly. Put the dish in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes. Layer the remaining ingredients in the following order:

Spread the avocado mix evenly over the beans
Spread the sour cream evenly over the avocado mix
Sprinkle the tomatoes over the avocado
Sprinkle the olive slices over the tomatoes
Sprinkle the onions over the olive slices
Sprinkle the chile peppers over the onions
Spread the cheese over the top
With a turner (flat spatula), gently pat down the entire surface to flatten the cheese



Serve as soon as possible but no more than 24 hours after making the avocado mix. Refrigerate, if you don't plan to serve it within 2 hours.

Presentation

This dish presents itself. Serve it with sturdy tortilla chips for dipping. You can set it out on the table for people to dip their chips in directly, but I always provide a steel turner for people to scoop out small portions onto their plates and spoons for them to push the mix onto their chips.

The California Ingredient

The peppers that Ortega uses for their canned chiles are referred to as "Anaheim" chiles. Emilio Ortega moved to Santa Fe de Nuevo México (now New Mexico) in 1890 and became fascinated with the territory's big ripe red chiles. He found that he preferred this chile when it was still young and green, because it was tender and mild in flavor. When he returned home to California a few years later, he brought some seeds with him and planted them in his garden near Ventura. They grew like crazy, and he gave most of the peppers away to friends and family. He found that if he roasted, peeled, seeded and washed them, he could preserve them in jars. After figuring out how to preserve them in cans, he founded the Ortega Chile Packaging Company, which was the first commercial food operation in the state of California. These chiles become known as "Anaheim" chiles when he planted them in a field near Anaheim, California.

Tips and Tricks

My 3-quart rectangular glass baking dish is actually a part of a Pyrex Portables food storage set (see sidebar below). It has the glass casserole dish, a tight-fitting plastic cover, an insulated carrying case, and a hot/cold pack. Because you will want to take this burrito bean dip to parties and on wine tasting trips, I recommend getting one of these portable sets rather than just the casserole dish.

This dish is not hot and not very spicy. If you want it to have a little heat, mix some Ortega *hot* diced chile peppers with the mild ones. This will add some kick but not overwhelm the other flavors.

Cool Gadget: The Pyrex Portables

In wine country, we attend a lot of early evening gatherings where everyone brings a dish and a bottle of wine. If we're at a winery, we just bring a dish. Our wine appreciation organizations, Knights of the Vine and Lodi Amateur Vintner's Association, each have one of these get-togethers every month. Then there are the family events and private dinners at friends' houses. I have two Pyrex Portables 3-Quart casserole dish sets. Each set has a plastic lid for the casserole dish, a hot/cold pack, and an insulated carry case. Food safety is important to me when serving family, friends, and colleagues. This 4-piece set helps keep the food out of the danger zone (41 to 140 degrees) until it's ready to serve, and it makes the food easy to carry around (no spills in the car).

