



WILL LYONS | DRINK

# The six best cabernet francs for barbecue season

Will Lyons

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pring has arrived and we need to talk about the Loire Valley — particularly its reds. For too long these have lurked under the radar, the grapes struggling to achieve sufficient ripeness and creating wines that were a little sour and lacking in charm. Not any more. Whether it's down to a warmer climate or just renewed focus in the vineyard, the region's

reds can now be highly rewarding, especially at this time of year as we move from winter warmers to seek more refined refreshment.

There are several red grape varieties under vine, including gamay, malbec and pinot noir, but it's cabernet franc that has caught my eye, especially around Saumur-Champigny, Bourgueil and Chinon. Along with pinot noir in Burgundy or sangiovese in Tuscany, cabernet franc offers concentration and intensity married with light acidity, its top notes of tart fruit including sour cherry and raspberry finishing with a dry, herbaceous spiciness. It's one of those uncomplicated, grippy wines that you can serve slightly chilled on its own or pull out for the first barbecue of the year. It's also perfect with spring lamb or, as I appreciated on a recent visit to Paris, a typical brasserie menu of steak frites and creamy soft cheeses. The combination of fattiness on the plate and brisk acidity in the glass morphs into a wonderful creaminess on the palate. Sample the fresh, lively 2019 Domaine Langlois-Chateau (13%; Noble Green Wines, £14) and you'll see what I mean.

Unlike Burgundy and Tuscany, however, the Loire offers phenomenal value for money. Insiders are aware this is one of the last great wine regions in Europe where prices are still modest and you can pick up great bottles from established producers such as Charles Joguet for less than £30. My advice is to get in on the act and enjoy them while they last — prices will inevitably rise.



**2020 Château du Hureau Saumur-Champigny Tuffe (13.5%)**

*Tanners, £16.20*

The charming Château du Hureau's deep-violet cabernet franc is intense and focused, packed with black cherry and robust tannins.

**2018 Domaine Filliatreau Vieilles Vignes (14.5%)**

*Yapp Brothers, £22*

A lovely example brimming with crunchy dark fruit including cassis, delivering a rich finish. Decant and savour with roast lamb and cheese.

**2020 Clos Guillot Bernard Baudry Chinon (13%)**

*Lea & Sandeman, £27.95*

Here's an exceptional wine from an exceptional Chinon estate, carrying intense floral aromas, juicy sour cherry and vivacious acidity.