

Beer & Food

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Like wine, the huge variety of beers can compliment and contrast with different food flavours and textures. The one common food that goes with all beers, unsurprisingly, is bread.

A good rule of thumb when trying to pair beer with food is to think about where the beer style originates and match the style with the flavours and textures associated with that region - e.g. German lagers and wheat beers with sausages and pickles, Indian curries with IPA (India Pale Ale), Irish stouts with rich stews. That's not to say that the most popular beers in any particular region are the best pairing for that cuisine; Mexican Tecate, Thai Singha, Indian Kingfisher, and China's Tsingtao are all great pilsners, but don't really stand up against the bold/spicy flavours of those countries' cuisines.

If you're pairing a whole meal with different beers, course by course, dish by dish, make sure to start with a light beer and work your way toward darker beers. If you don't, you may overwhelm your palate early on and miss some of the subtler notes and aromas of delicate beers.

When trying to think of what beer to match with a dish, consider the following:

Sensation

The temperature, texture, body, carbonation, acidity, or alcohol heat of the beer should **reduce, reset or cut** the physical sensation from the food. E.g. a light, bubbly beer with an oily, heavy dish.

Intensity

The sweetness/bitterness should **match** that of the food. E.g. A sweet, malty beer with a very sweet dish.

Taste

The sweet/sour/bitter/unami flavours of the beer should **contrast** against the food. E.g. A strongly bittersweet stout with salty oysters.

Flavour Elements

Things like nuttiness, smokiness, herbal or floral flavours should **match and compliment** the same flavour elements in the dish. E.g. A nut brown ale with roasted root vegetables, an english pale ale with a herby salad



| Beer Feature | Interaction | Food |
|--|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Hop Bitterness Roasted Malt Carbonation Alcohol | Balances | Sweetness Richness (fatty/oily) |
| Sweetness Maltiness | Balances | Spiciness Acidity |
| Hop Bitterness | Intensifies | Spiciness |

Light Lagers / Pilsners

Drier, crisper, refreshing beers with less fruity characteristics. Adds depth to light dishes. The high carbonation also helps to balance rich/fatty/oily foods. The sweeter/maltier the lager, the stronger/sweeter flavours it can stand up to, so lager is also a good choice to balance spiciness / chili heat. Good with salads, chicken, salty deep-fried foods like chips or spring rolls, delicate oily seafood like salmon sashimi, sushi, prawns, scallops, german bratwurst.

Recommended in China:

Spring rolls, chips, grilled scallops, squid, salad, seafood, light or oily Guangdong dishes, dim sum

Wheat Beer

Refreshing, slightly tart, sweet, citrus & coriander aromas with lemony/bready flavours pair well with citrus fruits, vinegar-dressed salads, herbs, pickles, mustard & horseradish, salty cured meats, shellfish, white sausage. Goes well with white wine/cream sauces. Like lagers but with more flavour intensity, they also cut well through rich/spicy/oily foods.

Recommended in China:

Ham, dressed cold dishes, sushi, Northern sausages, fruit salad, Thai salads, vegetable dishes.

Amber / Nut Brown

Sweeter/nuttier flavours pair well with desserts. Brown sugar, butter, caramel, maple syrup, vanilla, coconut, toffee, dates, cakes, chocolate all pair well. The sweetness can also offset bitter or spicy foods, as well as compliment the maynard effect of BBQ meat. Hoppier beers feature herbal/floral/citrus notes that could be matched well with similar flavoured dishes.

Recommended in China:

Flower cakes, sweeter Guangdong or Zhejiang dishes, Sichuan sausage, NorthWest-style BBQ, Roast poultry

Porters / Stouts

The darkest, maltiest, sweetest, and often quite bitter/smoky flavours work well to match with strongly flavoured foods, especially salty/unami flavours such as BBQ, beef, rich stews, bacon, chocolate desserts, and oysters.

Recommended in China:

Dongbei food - rich, hearty, salty. Smoked meat. BBQ fish. Beef. Bacon.

IPA

An intensely flavoured beer needs an intensely flavoured dish. Be aware that the hop acids intensify chili heat, which may or may not be desired. The aroma hops used determine which dishes match well, from citrusy, tropical fruit hops to earthy/grassy ones. IPAs generally pair well with highly spiced dishes like curries, or very sweet desserts like iced carrot cake, where the bitterness can cut through the sweetness.

Recommended in China:

Hunan/Sichuan food, Sweet & Sour dishes, Kunming BBQ. Thai curries.

Lambics / Fruit Beers

Obviously fruity & sour flavours match well so these go well with fruits, pickled dishes, fruity desserts. The sourness along with the high carbonation can also cut through rich and oily or creamy dishes.

Recommended in China:

Fruit, roast duck/goose

Cooking with Beer

Beer is a great cooking ingredient for 3 reasons:

- it contains enzymes that can tenderise meat by breaking down long fibres, making it great for stews and marinades (e.g. beer-braised duck or irish stew)
- depending on the type of beer used, it can add a lot of flavours such as rich caramel or delicate floral notes
- it can accentuate alcohol-soluble flavour compounds in foods like tomatoes (the same way that wine is used in much of Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese cooking)