

Best festive fizz

You don't have to spend a fortune on big-name bubbly this Christmas. We reveal the affordable supermarket stars that our experts rated highly

Whether you're hosting a large Christmas party or enjoying a low-key family gathering, there's plenty of reliable, quality fizz to be found at the supermarket without going above £25. There are even some brilliant bottles for half that price if you branch out to cheaper crémants, which have a similar taste profile and production process to champagnes.

Our expert panel blind-tasted own-label non-vintage (NV) champagnes nominated by supermarkets alongside leading brands costing up to £40. They also tasted cheaper sparkling wines up to £15. Waitrose Blanc de Blancs Brut and

Tesco Finest Premier Cru came out on top for champagne. But several cheaper options weren't far behind, so wherever you shop there should be good-value fizz.

What's in a vintage?

Our experts explained there's serious art behind the blending process of non-vintage wines. Grapes harvested from different years are used to create a 'house style' – as opposed to vintage bottles, which reflect the unique characteristics of the year the grapes are harvested in.

The result is a reliable taste you can turn to again and again, with this year's bunch being classed as great 'safe' choices for when you're entertaining.



TOP TIP: BAG A BARGAIN

Our experts advised that stocking up on good champagne is worthwhile, as it gets better with age. They're fans of a multibuy deal, so take advantage of offers on the fizz you like. The same can't be said of prosecco, so don't let it gather dust and only stock up ahead of a big occasion.



ALDI VEUVE MONSIGNY PREMIER CRU CHAMPAGNE BRUT **77%** £19.99

This fizz wasn't the most complex, but it had intense, well-defined aromas of quince and lemon tart. It's a pleasant, easygoing and classic-style champagne with savoury flavours and a citrus finish.



SAINSBURY'S TASTE THE DIFFERENCE CHAMPAGNE BRUT NV **76%** £18.50

Smooth, complex with well integrated flavours, this medium-intensity fizz had almondy apricot and ripe yellow apple notes. Not quite a Best Buy, but still a delicious – and cheaper – choice.



M&S DELACOURT BRUT CHAMPAGNE **74%** £25

With simple, fruity aromas and a delicate, salty finish, this classic champagne wasn't the most complex, according to one of the experts. But the elegantly balanced flavour profile and lingering finish won over the rest of the panel.



MORRISONS THE BEST ETIENNE LECLAIR BRUT CHAMPAGNE **73%** £23

Our experts highlighted the pronounced savoury aftertaste of this fruity fizz, with notes of yellow apple and citrus. It was refreshing and had moderate complexity, defined aromas and delicate toastiness.



BEST BUY

WAITROSE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT NV CHAMPAGNE **82%** £25.99

A pleasing and rewarding champagne with delicate, toasty notes and ripe fruit aromas. Our experts thought it had good acidity, and loved the balanced finish and savoury aftertaste of this flavoursome Best Buy.

BEST BUY

TESCO FINEST PREMIER CRU BRUT CHAMPAGNE **82%** £23

The unusual golden colour initially surprised our experts, but they were impressed by the expressive aromas of this elegant, well-balanced fizz. Filled with flavours of brioche, roasted apples and with a nutty finish, it's a worthy Best Buy.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW BEEDLE



WAITROSE CHAMPAGNE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT

72% £26.99
This solid, well-balanced brut champagne had notes of marmalade and sourdough, with a pecan-nut palate and a smooth finish. Although one of the experts noted a slightly bitter aftertaste.



M&S LOUIS VERTAY CHAMPAGNE BRUT **71%** £18

The experts enjoyed the good complexity and intensity of this toasty, fruity champagne. It had a gentle and crisp palate, and a nutty finish with an elegant and pleasant aftertaste.



CO-OP LES PIONNIERS NV CHAMPAGNE **68%** £19.50

Subtle but refined aromas, with notes of citrus and blossom, characterised this moderately complex champagne. Our experts praised its well-balanced palate and ripe fruity aromas with a touch of breadiness.



SAINSBURY'S TASTE THE DIFFERENCE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT CHAMPAGNE **67%** £21.50

This champagne divided the panel. One expert noted a lack of complexity, although recognised some savouriness and fruity aromas, while another described it as subtle and quite elegant.

EXPERT PANEL



Sam Caporn MW
Master of wine, writer, consultant and co-chair of the International Wine Challenge



Federica Zanghirella
Wine expert and vice-president of the UK Sommelier Association



Magnavai Janjo
Founder of wine importer and consultancy MJ Wine Cellars



Peter Richards MW
Master of wine, writer, presenter and broadcaster

Why you don't need big-brand fizz

When you're looking for a bottle of bubbly, choosing a recognisable brand might seem like a safe bet. But our test shows there's no need to splash out on a pricey one. While Lanson Le Black Label Brut still scored well (77%, £36), we found several supermarket bottles that are either as good or better, and cost at least £10 less. Meanwhile, Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial (68%, £39) was outclassed by plenty of supermarket options, including a much cheaper Lidl fizz (Lidl Carpentier Brut, 69%, £13.99).

Bubbles on a budget

Aldi and M&S (see p12-13) may have taken the top spots when it comes to bargain bubbles, but there's something for everyone among the rest of the supermarket fizz – whether that's crémant, prosecco or a less well-known sparkling wine



MORRISONS THE BEST CRÉMANT DE LIMOUX
73% £12.50
Our experts liked the balanced palate and delicate aromas of this crémant. Citrus fruits on the nose and apple pith notes made for a refreshing fizz to complement canapés, such as smoked salmon blinis.



ASDA EXTRA SPECIAL PROSECCO BRUT
71% £8
This fresh, light prosecco has notes of ripe peach and yellow apples, and one expert even noted a hint of rhubarb and custard. The panel thought it would work well with fish or lightly seasoned turkey.



WAITROSE BLUEPRINT PROSECCO **70%** £7.99
Tropical melon and acacia notes came through in this aromatic prosecco. With soft acidity and a smooth, gentle finish, it's a definite crowd pleaser. One expert deemed it overly sweet, but overall it went down well with our panel.



TESCO FINEST 1531 BLANQUETTE DE LIMOUX
70% £9.50
A delicate wine with aromas of red apple and honeysuckle. Its acidity was well balanced and the aftertaste was pleasant, too. One expert suggested pairing it with turkey and roasted vegetables.



LIDL CRÉMANT DE LOIRE
70% £8.99
'Elegant and beautifully balanced' was how one of our experts described it. This is a fruity and floral crémant, with melon on the nose and a fresh, lemony finish. Drink it with fish dishes for a perfect pairing.



SAINSBURY'S TASTE THE DIFFERENCE CRÉMANT DE LOIRE **68%** £12
Blossom and yellow apple evolve into a savoury finish in this wine. Not the best crémant our experts tasted, but it's still acceptable. Pair with pork dishes such as honey-roast gammon or pigs in blankets.

Can cheaper champagne cut it?

Cheaper champagnes are an increasingly familiar sight, and our test included two bottles costing less than £15. Overall, while OK, these budget bubbles weren't particularly impressive, so if you want something special it might be worth spending a little more – or opting for one of our top crémants instead.



LIDL CARPENTIER CHAMPAGNE BRUT
69% £13.99
The panel pointed out the toasted notes and ripe fruit aromas of this champagne. However, some of the experts found it uninspiring, with one saying it 'ticks the boxes, without ever thrilling'.



LIDL MONTAUDON CHAMPAGNE BRUT
67% £14.99
One of the experts described it as fruity and floral with good intensity and delicate aroma. However, others felt that this brut champagne was underwhelming and too basic.

SERVING AND STORING TIPS

- Sparkling wine is best served chilled but not ice-cold – aim for around 8°C to 10°C for a non vintage and slightly warmer for a vintage. If it's too cold it flattens the aromas, so you don't get the full flavour when drinking. Avoid serving warm, as this can cause the wine to bubble over.
- When it comes to glasses to serve it in, a flute is the classic choice, but our experts say it doesn't allow you to get your nose in, so you lose some of the aroma. They suggest a white wine glass, but also say pick the glass you enjoy the most – if you like the retro thrill of a coupe, go for it.
- Store any leftovers in the fridge with a sparkling wine stopper to preserve the bubbles. This should give it another two or three days. An open bottle of champagne tends to last a bit longer than prosecco, due to the tightness of the bubbles.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW BEEDLE

Best red wines

Wonderful winter reds to warm the cockles, as rated by our experts

BEST BUY

M&S EL DUQUE DE MIRALTA RIOJA RESERVA **80%** £13, SPAIN
Ripe black cherries with hints of cinnamon and clove make for a 'wintry and warming' bottle of wine. Our experts praised its balanced acidity, pleasant finish and notes of oak – a sign of its lengthy ageing process. This top-scoring red would make the perfect pairing with your Christmas Day turkey.

Awarming glass of red makes a wonderful accompaniment to a Christmas roast, complementing the rich, meaty flavours often found at the table.

To help you find the best reds for the festive season, we asked supermarkets to nominate own-label or exclusive red wines priced between £4.50 and £13, which represent good value for money and are well suited for drinking in the winter months.

Our experts blind-tasted and rated each bottle, and, while it was the priciest red from M&S that took the top spot, Aldi's well-priced Château Les Trois Manoirs Médoc (77%, £8, p12) impressed, too. Co-op and Sainsbury's offerings are also reasonably priced and not far behind.

How to choose

Our selection of red wines includes a range of aromas and flavours to suit different tastes. If you prefer a heavier red, look for black fruit flavours or spices such as black pepper. If you want something lighter, go for red fruits such as redcurrants and cherries. Our experts said not to shy away from lighter reds in the colder months, as they can lift a heavy meal.



SAINSBURY'S TASTE THE DIFFERENCE LANGUEDOC ROUGE **74%** £8, FRANCE
An intense, fruity medium-bodied wine with notes of plum and blackcurrant. One expert felt this heavier red would work well when paired with food such as roast beef or even a hearty Boxing Day stew.



CO-OP IRRESISTIBLE FAIRTRADE ORGANIC MALBEC
74% £7.50, ARGENTINA
One expert described this wine as 'balanced and delicious'. It had cherry and blackberry notes with hints of chocolate and black pepper – a well-priced crowd-pleaser.



WAITROSE NO.1 CEDERBERG SYRAH **73%** £11.99, SOUTH AFRICA
Gentle chargrilled notes on the nose are balanced with ripe cherries and blueberries in this elegant wine. One expert noted a slightly bitter aftertaste, but this doesn't take away from its quality.

IF YOU PREFER A HEAVIER RED, LOOK FOR BLACK FRUIT FLAVOURS OR SPICES SUCH AS BLACK PEPPER