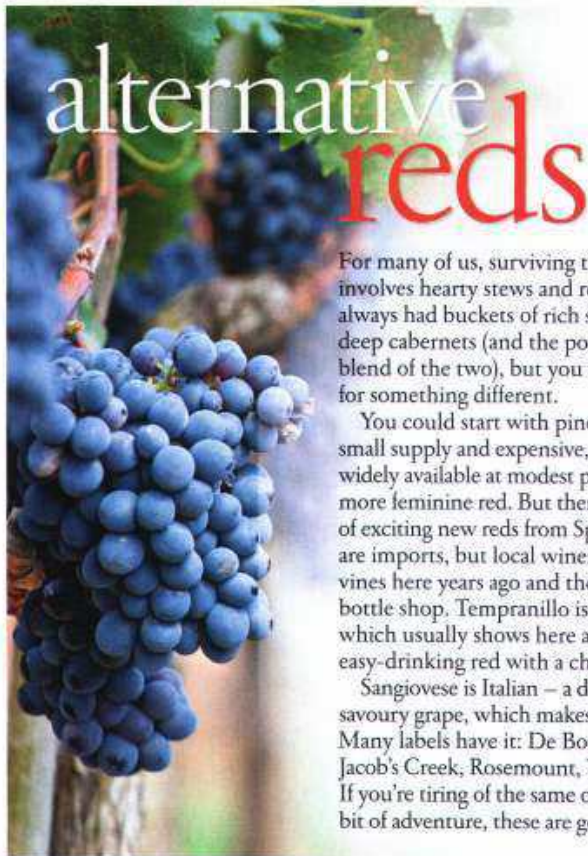




toptipples

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Discover why European grapes are flavour of the month



alternative reds

For many of us, surviving through winter involves hearty stews and red wine. We've always had buckets of rich shiraz and fine deep cabernets (and the popular Aussie blend of the two), but you may be looking for something different.

You could start with pinot noir. Once in small supply and expensive, pinot is now more widely available at modest prices. It's a lighter, more feminine red. But there are also a couple of exciting new reds from Spain and Italy. Some are imports, but local winemakers planted vines here years ago and they're now in your bottle shop. Tempranillo is a Spanish grape, which usually shows here as a softer-style, easy-drinking red with a cherryish flavour.

Sangiovese is Italian – a drier, firmer, more savoury grape, which makes it great with food. Many labels have it: De Bortoli, Houghton, Jacob's Creek, Rosemount, Westend Estate. If you're tiring of the same old reds, and like a bit of adventure, these are good places to start.



better bottles

Taylor's Estate Tempranillo, \$18 Features a deep, dark berry aroma and berry flavours, with spicy notes. Not too heavy and very flavourful. Try it with sausages.

Deakin Estate Viognier, \$10 A white grape from France, pronounced 'vee-on-yay', that is fresh and light with a unique touch of tropical fruit lusciousness.

Yellow Tail Pinot Noir, \$9 Doesn't have the full power of a high-priced pinot, but still offers a very pretty, strawberry character with soft cherry flavours. Inexpensive pleasure.



On the road with prosecco

Prosecco is a white grape that has become famous in northern Italy for producing sparkling wine. Soft, light and lower in alcohol, it's not nearly as serious as French champagne. It's a perfect refresher on its own and also makes a very good mixer with fruit juices – the original Bellini from Venice is made with prosecco and peach juice.

This grape has become very visible in Australia recently. Six winemaking families with Italian heritage have been perfecting their wines over the past 10 years and now want you to hit the road... the Prosecco Road, that is, in King Valley, near the Victorian snowfields. Brown Brothers, Chrismont, Ciccone Estate, Dal Zotto, Pizzini and Sam Miranda would love you to visit the beautiful King Valley and sample their food and wine, especially their prosecco with rustic Italian cooking and a game of bocce.

If you're down that way, it's a most enjoyable day or two. If you can't make it, check the shelves for a bottle of this young and inexpensive bubbly. It's a cheerful and lively way to greet your guests and is terrific with lighter seafood and pasta dishes.

Words: Ian MacLaurin; photography: Stockphoto, Getty Images