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Box wines worth a try

It's Memorial Day. Summer is just around the corner and picnics, barbecues and a host of other outdoor activities are in full swing.

If your beverage of choice usually consists of some kind of six-pack in aluminum cans, I'd like you to consider taking along some wine as a change of pace at your next outing.

Unconventional packaging for wines is becoming increasingly popular and the functionality of non-bottled wines is undeniable. They travel easily, they serve large groups of people well and, in many cases, they retain the freshness of the wine better than a recorked bottle.

The big issue that remains is taste. Now, I won't go so far as to say that these wines are going to win any major awards, but the quality — especially when compared to box wines of, say, a decade ago — has noticeably improved.

So put your wine-snob attitude aside and give these wines a try. You might be in for a pleasant surprise.

Wine Block (about \$10) — You may find it hard to

French Rabbit (about \$11)

— From southern France (gasp!) comes an octagon-shaped, squeezable package with a screw-top enclosure that holds one liter of wine. Current releases include chardonnay, pinot noir, merlot and cabernet sauvignon.

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Black Box (about \$24) — A whopping four, 750-milliliter bottles of Monterey County, Calif., wine are contained in a vacuum-sealed bag surrounded by a black box. The chardonnay makes for a good summer wine; it's crisp and light with some nice green apple flavors.