



Cheese 101: Cheeseboard and Pairings





Nothing is more elegant, simple and delicious than a slice of creamy cheese paired with a complementing food or beverage. Use these suggestions to make cheese the cornerstone of your gatherings. Pairings can be elaborate or impromptu – all it takes is a little creativity and a few good friends!



FRESH CHEESES

These cheeses, high in moisture and smooth on the palate, are mild, rich and creamy. Some are ideal for spreading; all are delicious. Other styles include Mozzarella and Ricotta.

Mascarpone

Sweet, Creamy

PAIRS WITH:

- Fresh seasonal fruit, a simple biscuit and local honey
- Add a tsp. of vanilla extract and use as dessert topping

Havarti

Creamy, Buttery, Herbaceous

PAIRS WITH:

- Crisp apples and pears
- A glass of Ice-cold green tea

Feta

Crumbly, Tart, Salty

PAIRS WITH:

- Greek olives, roasted marinated peppers and crisp water crackers
- A crisp sparkling cider

Queso Fresco

Simple, Pure

PAIRS WITH:

- Fresh pita or tortilla wedges and colorful veggies
- A glass of fruit punch or flavored sparkling water



SOFT-RIPENED CHEESES

Soft, ripened cheeses have a bloomy, edible rind that ripens the cheese from the outside in. Be sure to bring these varieties to room temperature before serving, warm in the oven, or serve in a puff pastry crust.

Brie

Rich, Creamy, Earthy

PAIRS WITH:

- Chutney, dried fruit or fig jam
- Bake in the oven with honey and fresh herbs

Camembert

Intense, Creamy, Decadent

PAIRS WITH:

- Plain crackers or a crusty French baguette
- A Cherry Cola as bubbles help break down the fat



BLUE-VEINED CHEESES

These cheeses feature blue-to-grey streaking, a distinctive taste, and a pleasant pique on the palate.

Stilton

Bold, Intense

PAIRS WITH:

- Honey and walnuts
- Dark chocolate or caramel

Gorgonzola or Blue

Rich, Complex

PAIRS WITH:

- Cranberries, cherries or apricots
- Honey butter or sour cherry jam



HARD AND SEMI-HARD CHEESES

Hard cheeses deliver a flavor intensity that is beyond compare, while semi-hard cheese have a firm texture and wide variety of flavors.

Cheddar

Rich, Sharp, Peppery

PAIRS WITH:

- Hearty sausage, beef or venison jerky, or fruit
- A glass of cold lemonade

Gouda

Sweet, Buttery

PAIRS WITH:

- Piquillo peppers, salted almonds or bits of hearty country ham
- A glass of Root Beer, coffee, or chai tea

Swiss

Hearty, Nutty

PAIRS WITH:

- Piquillo peppers, pickles, or pistachios
- Hearty Ham or roasted root vegetables

Parmesan

Salty, Nutty, Granular

PAIRS WITH:

- Spiced nuts, olives or cured charcuterie
- Sprinkle on something sweet like chocolate cake or a doughnut



HOW TO FIND LOCAL CHEESES

- Look for local cheesemaker guilds or groups to find local makers.
- Check out the labels for cheeses made in your state and look for key words like “artisan” or “farmstead”
- Visit a local cheese shop or grocery deli to sample delicious local cheeses



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Cheese Crisps with Creamy Avocado Dip

Ingredients

- 3 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 3 cups parmesan cheese, grated
- 3 teaspoons chili powder
(or to your taste)
- 2 whole avocados, seeded and scooped out of peel
- 1/2 cup Greek yogurt
- 3 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1/3 teaspoon cumin, ground
- 1 teaspoon Kosher salt

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400. Line two half sheet baking pans with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, stir together cheeses and chili powder.
3. Drop heaping tablespoons of cheese mixture onto baking sheets in 8 equal portions (*the cheeses will spread as they melt so leave space between each portion*).
4. Place baking sheets in the oven and bake for 8 minutes or until cheese begins to brown at the edges (*watch them carefully to prevent burning*).
5. Remove baking sheets from oven and transfer cheese crisps to paper towels to drain and cool (*cheese will become crisp once cool*).
6. Repeat baking process two more times, or until all of the cheese mixture is baked.
7. While crisps cool, combine avocados, yogurt, cilantro leaves, lime juice, cumin and salt in a food processor or blender and blend until smooth.
8. Serve crisps immediately with creamy avocado dip or your favorite salsa.

Red Onion Balsamic Jam

Pair with a cheddar or nutty alpine style cheese

Ingredients

- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 2 lbs red onions, thinly sliced
- 1 cup dry red wine or cooking wine
- 1/3 cup light brown sugar
- 1 TBSP fresh thyme, chopped
- 2 TBSP raspberry balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 tsp. Kosher salt, plus more to taste
- Pepper to Taste

Instructions

Heat the olive oil over medium in a skillet and add the onions and cook until softened and just translucent. Do not allow onions to brown. Cook for 8-10 minutes. Add the wine, sugar, thyme, vinegar, and salt. Bring to a boil, and simmer until the liquid thickens, about 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve at room temperature. Can be stored in the refrigerator for 2 weeks.

Recipe Courtesy of Megan Lewis – cheesemonger, Milk Made Catering



HOW TO MAKE A CHEESEBOARD

Step 1: Find the right board.

A large wooden or slate cheeseboard helps add contrast to the colors of the cheese.

Step 2: Select the Cheeses

Follow the rule of odds. Plan on three to five cheeses depending upon the size of your party. Choose a variety of flavors and textures. Remember, variety is the spice of life!

Step 3: Select the Meat

To add more variety and flavor to your cheeseboard, add a selection of cured meats. One to three cured meats such as Coppa, Speck, Prosciutto, or Salami, are a great start.

Step 4: Add Sides Galore

Add color, texture and a variety of flavors to your cheeseboard. You can't go wrong with fresh or dried fruits, nuts and bread. Add some surprising items like honey, mustard, jams, and pickled vegetables.

Step 5: Artfully Arrange

Your guests will always remember your creativity and the delicious cheese!



SERVING SUGGESTIONS:

Typical serving size for cheese is 1 – 2 ounces per person per variety depending on the size of your party and if other appetizers are served.

To bring out the best flavors in cheese, remove the cheese from the refrigerator at least one-half hour before serving.

STORAGE TIPS:

Best: Use cheese paper, a two-ply paper which allows cheese to breathe while maintaining optimal humidity.

Better: Wrap cheese in waxed or parchment paper and then in plastic wrap.

When storing blue cheese, use aluminum foil, it thrives in that environment.

Avoid: Resealable plastic bags and do not leave cheese in the same wrapping for extended periods of time.



CHEESE THE DAY!

- Natural cheese is a **fermented food** made from **four basic ingredients** including milk, salt, “good bacteria,” and an enzyme called rennet.
- Cheese is a versatile, craveable way to add **nutrition** to your diet. Cheeses are good sources of calcium, protein and phosphorus, three nutrients particularly important to help **build and maintain healthy bones**.
- For those who are **lactose intolerant**, cheese is an important source of **calcium**. Natural cheeses such as Cheddar, Colby, Monterey Jack, Mozzarella, Swiss, and Parmesan contain minimal amounts of lactose.
- Good cheese starts on the farm with excellent **animal care** and dedication to **sustainability**. America’s dairy farmers are committed to feeding their communities while **taking care of the planet**.

Recipes and information on dairy’s path from farm to table at **USDairy.com**



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From Your Local
Dairy Farm Families

Thank you to Megan Lewis, cheesemonger and owner of Milk Made Catering for advice on all things cheese!