

# Specialty Foods Guide - Cheese



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## Tips for Buying Cheese

1. When buying cheese, it's best to find a reliable source, such as an Avendra-approved supplier. Specialty distributors have similar criteria of their specialty cheese suppliers, helping to ensure that the cheese is wholesome and good manufacturing practices have been followed.
2. Check the labels, especially on fresh cheeses, to make sure that the product is well within its expiration date. For larger cheeses that are cut down to smaller amounts, the distributor should also include an expiration date on the cut down piece of cheese.
3. Check the condition of the cheese, especially for aroma, appearance, and flavor. Less desirable characteristics include ammonia, sour milk, barnyard or unclean aromas. Further, the cheeses should be characteristic of their style, with an interior that is free of cracks, discoloration, and mold (unless it is a blue cheese). Note that natural rind cheeses may have a rustic appearance.
4. Because of the wide variety of dietary concerns and restrictions, check labels for the type of milk (cow, goat, sheep) from which the cheese was made. A good distributor will be able to tell you the source, especially if religious, dietary or animal rights concerns govern your menu. At present, product ingredient labeling is inconsistent, but most good cheese makers will supply the most important information on their labels.
5. In general, buy only as much cheese as will be consumed within a few days. If the cheese is wrapped in plastic at purchase, rewrap the cheese as soon as possible in waxed or parchment paper, as air and moisture are integral to keeping the cheese in the best possible condition.

## Serving Cheese

When putting together cheese boards to be served before or after dinner, limit the selection to no more than five different cheeses. Serve cheeses of different sizes, shapes, and flavor or texture profiles to create diversity and add interest to your cheese board. Strong, pungent cheeses should not be placed next to delicately flavored cheeses, and try to have individual knives for each cheese.

Try serving cheeses on a wooden board, marble slab, straw mat, or flat wicker basket. Do not overcrowd the serving tray, leave room to slice the cheeses. Serve bread or plain crackers on a separate plate or basket.

Apples, pears, grapes, strawberries, fresh figs and melon add variety to a cheese board, especially if cheese is being served with cocktails. Additional accompaniments can include nuts, such as walnuts or Marcona almonds, fig cakes, and any manner of condiments, such as floral honeys, lemon curds, fruit paste, wine jellies, and Italian mostarda.



## Proper Cheese Storage

1. Always rewrap cheese in fresh wrapping, preferably in waxed or parchment paper, after the cheese has been opened to avoid having the cheese dry out or pick up other flavors.
2. The recommended temperature range for storing cheese is between 35 and 45 degrees Fahrenheit, at a high humidity level portion of a walk-in or reach-in.
3. In general, never freeze natural cheeses, as they may lose their texture, and in some cases their flavor profiles will be seriously altered. If you must freeze cheese, allow the cheese to thaw slowly in the refrigerator and use it for cooking, as the texture will become crumbly and dry after it is defrosted.
4. Double wrap strong, pungent cheeses, such as blue, aged brick, or washed rind varieties, to avoid having their aromas permeate other foods.
5. If stored and wrapped cheeses are overly dry, develop a slimy texture, exhibit ammoniated or any off odors, it's best to discard them.

## Cooking with Cheese

1. When preparing dishes using cheese, add the cheese at the end of the preparation, especially in sauces, classic risotto and soups. In casseroles and baked dishes, sprinkle the grated/shredded cheese over the dish the last ten minutes of baking.
2. Grating cheese is easier when the cheese is cold. Four ounces of ungrated cheese yields one cup when grated.
3. When cooking with cheese on the stovetop, cook cheese over low to medium heat, as cooking over high heat, or for long periods of time, will cause the cheese to separate.
4. Aged cheeses have more concentrated flavor than younger cheeses and often require less additional seasoning.
5. Dishes prepared with cheese and cooked in a microwave oven should be cooked at lower power settings, to prevent the cheese from separating.



## Basic Cheese Characteristics

Type of Cheese	Characteristics	Examples
<b>Fresh</b>	The term fresh is used to describe cheeses that have not been aged, or are very slightly cured. These cheeses have high moisture content and are usually mild and have a creamy taste and soft texture.	Includes Mascarpone, Ricotta, Chevre, Feta, Cream Cheese and Cottage Cheese
<b>Soft-Ripened</b>	The term soft-ripened is used to describe cheeses that are ripened from the outside in, very soft and even runny at room temperature. The most common soft-ripened cheeses have a white, bloomy rind that is sometimes flecked with red or brown. The rind is edible and is produced by spraying the surface of the cheese with a special mold.	Includes brie and camembert styles, triple crèmes
<b>Semi-Soft</b>	The term semi-soft is used to describe cheeses that have a smooth, generally, creamy interior with little or no rind. These cheeses are generally high in moisture content and range from very mild in flavor to very pungent. Semi-soft cheeses may be made from both pasteurized and raw milk, depending on the aging requirements and the style the cheese maker is creating.	Includes many blue cheeses, Colby, Fontina styles, Havarti and Monterey Jack.  Many washed rind cheeses fall into this category and are described separately.
<b>Firm / Hard</b>	The terms firm and hard are used to describe a very broad category of cheeses. Their taste profiles range from very mild to sharp and pungent. They generally have a texture profile that ranges from elastic, at room temperature, to the hard cheeses that can be grated.	Includes Gouda styles, most Cheddars, dry Jack, Swiss (Emmenthaler) styles, Gruyere styles, many "tomme" styles and Parmesan styles

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<b>Blue</b>	The term blue is used to describe cheeses that have distinctive blue/green veining, created when a specific mold is added during the cheese making process, and is exposed to air. This mold provides a distinct flavor to the cheese, which ranges from fairly mild to assertive and pungent.	Blue cheeses may be made in many styles, the most common being the French (Roquefort), Italian (Gorgonzola) and Danish blue styles
<b>Pasta Filata</b>	The term pasta Filata is applied to a whole family of cheeses, mostly of Italian origin. The pasta Filata cheeses are cooked and kneaded, or spun, as the name implies.	Includes Italian style Mozzarella, Provolone, and Scamorza
<b>Natural Rind</b>	Natural rind cheeses have rinds that are self-formed during the aging process. Generally, no molds or micro flora are added, nor is washing used to create the exterior rinds, and those that do exhibit molds and micro flora in their rinds get them naturally from the environment.	Many “tomme” style cheeses fall into this category, especially the French Tomme de Savoie and Mimolette, as well as the English Stilton (also a blue), and Lancashire cheeses
<b>Washed Rind</b>	Washed rind is used to describe those cheeses that are surface-ripened by washing the cheese throughout the ripening/aging process with brine, beer, wine, brandy, or a mixture of ingredients, which encourages the growth of bacteria.	Includes some tomme-style cheeses, triple-crème, and semi-soft cheeses, similar to Epoisses, Livarot and Taleggio
<b>Processed</b>	The term processed is used to describe cheese by-products made from a combination of natural cheese and added ingredients that are used to create a consistent and shelf-stable product	Includes American Cheese, processed cheese spreads, and “cheese flavored” spreads

NOTE: All American made cheeses must be made from pasteurized milk.

