

Wegmans

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# menu

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*Happy Holidays*





# Soft-ripened to perfection

All soft-ripened cheeses are not the same. Find out what makes the ones at Wegmans stand out from the crowd—as our team learned during their trip through France earlier this year.

By Janet Fletcher   Photography by Tricia Bauer



Left to right: Dairy cattle near Saligny. Wegmans new Triple Crème Cheese. A street scene in Pelussin.

## French soft-ripened cheeses

Like a familiar face in a crowd, a big, creamy wedge of Brie on a holiday buffet puts guests immediately at ease. People recognize the cheese, they can pronounce it, and they love it. Spread on a slice of crusty baguette and surrounded with toasted nuts and olives, it's the perfect companion to sparkling wine or festive holiday cocktails like pomegranate martinis (see our “Be Your Own Bartender” feature on page 93).

But, paradoxically, the popularity of this classic French cheese has made selling it more of a challenge. French producers have responded to America's love affair with Brie by making the cheese in a range of styles: some mild, some buttery; others with bolder, more mushroomy aromas and flavors. Because package labels don't often indicate where the cheese falls on the flavor spectrum, consumers risk buying a Brie that may be too bland for their taste or too pungent.



Facing page: Wegmans Triple Crème Cheese in the aging room at Lincet Dairy. At left: The Wegmans team with their hosts from Guilloteau along the Rhone River near Pelussin.



“Our goal is to make it easy for our customers to find the cheese that’s right for them. We don’t want them to have to guess.”

Cathy Gaffney, Wegmans Cheese Department group manager.



Clockwise from top: Wegmans Cheese Shop Managers Becca Clary (Fairfax, VA), Monika Thompson (Hunt Valley, MD), and Sanjay Sharma (Dulles, VA) compare notes at a Guilloteau cheese tasting. Wegmans offers Brie at three levels of flavor: Mild, Medium, and Intense. Jean-Claude Bloch talks about Guilloteau’s incredibly creamy, mild Brie.

Not long ago, the cheese professionals at Wegmans decided to make it easier for shoppers to make an informed choice. After a lengthy tasting involving the department’s most experienced palates, the Wegmans cheese team hand-selected three Bries, each the best in their class. Labeled as Wegmans Mild, Medium or Intense Brie, these cheeses still bear the name of the producer—no secrets there—but the flavor designation predominates. “Our goal is to make it easy for our customers to find the cheese that’s right for them. We don’t want them to have to guess,” says Cathy Gaffney, Wegmans cheese department group manager.

Having re-focused the Brie selection, several Wegmans cheese staffers went to France last spring to visit the cheesemakers. That may sound like a vacation to some, but this team had serious objectives: to tour suppliers’ farms and facilities, to learn more about soft-ripened cheeses such as Brie and Wegmans new Triple Crème, and to meet the people behind the cheeses. Unlike a relationship based on e-mails, such face-to-face encounters make it possible to confirm that a supplier shares Wegmans’ values.

### Our Three Bries

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**mild**

Wegmans Mild Brie, (the silky cheese aka Fromager d’Affinois), with cow’s milk from local farms, none more than 30 kilometers away. The cows here dine on mountain pastures, not silage (fermented feed), which can compromise cheese quality.



**medium**

Wegmans Medium Brie (Marquis de Lafayette) has a smooth, buttery texture and a delicate, fruity aroma.



**intense**

Intense (Le Chatelain) takes the flavor up a few notches with an earthier, mushroomy flavor.

Discovering the secret to incredibly creamy Brie

The team learned firsthand about soft-ripened cheese production at Guilloteau (ghee-o-tow), a cheesemaker based in the town of Pelussin in France’s Rhône-Alpes region. This company produces Wegmans Mild Brie, (the silky cheese aka Fromager d’Affinois), with cow’s milk from local farms, none more than 30 kilometers away. The cows here dine on mountain pastures, not silage (fermented feed), which can compromise cheese quality.

But what most impressed the Wegmans group was the company’s proprietary ultra-filtration process, a method of removing water from the milk—in essence, condensing the milk—before cheesemaking begins. The practice yields a cheese that quickly becomes uniformly creamy throughout (most soft-ripened cheeses are creamiest just under the rind and firmer at the core) and remains so for a long time.

“The ultra-filtration process is amazing,” says Hunt Valley (MD) Cheese Shop Manager Monika Thompson. “I was impressed with the consistency of quality that Guilloteau is able to offer as a result. When you combine that with their pride and desire for excellence, you can see why their product is so good. It’s not just cheese. It’s a ‘love’ for them.”

Thanks to ultra-filtration, the cheese also has more protein and almost four times as much calcium as traditional Brie. But it’s not just the nutritional profile that keeps people coming back. “When we were tasting the cheese at Guilloteau, I had trouble



Above: Along the Rhone River in eastern France. At right: Guilloteau’s special packaging allows airflow around its cheeses, which in turn allows the cheese to age uniformly during shipping.



resisting third and fourth helpings,” says Becca Clary, Cheese Shop Manager in Wegmans’ Fairfax (VA) store.

Guilloteau enriches the milk with cream for Wegmans Mild Brie so the cheese qualifies as a double crème—about halfway, in terms of fat, between classic Brie and a triple crème. The ivory interior has a suave, utterly seductive texture; the aroma is subtle, but with hints of mushroom and clotted cream. “It was fascinating to learn what it takes to make these cheeses. From the milk itself to the science behind ultra-filtration—every variable can affect the cheese’s flavor,” notes Wegmans Dulles (VA) store manager Phil Quattrini.



Clockwise from top: Jean-Claude Bloch explains how Guilloteau’s milk is forced through a series of microscopic filters. The filtered milk is ultra-concentrated—to five times its original level—and the Brie they make with it is extremely creamy as a result. Freshly cut Brie on the aging racks. Stainless-steel towers where the milk from local farms is temporarily stored.

“You can see why their product is so good. It’s not just cheese. It’s a ‘love’ for them.”

Monika Thompson, Cheese Shop Manager in Wegmans Hunt Valley (MD) store.



The experience in France introduced Wegmans staffers to some of the techniques—from culture selection to aging methods—that cheesemakers use to produce Brie in a range of intensities. Wegmans Medium Brie (Marquis de Lafayette), has a smooth, buttery texture and a delicate, fruity aroma. Wegmans Intense Brie (Le Chatelain) relies on a different culture and a slow fermentation to produce more pronounced aromas of truffle, nuts and earth. “It is definitely more complex,” says Gaffney.

But a gutsy Brie may or may not be what the customer is seeking, depending on the context and who’s coming for dinner. That’s why identifying Wegmans Bries by intensity, and offering a range, makes so much sense. “You might like all three but want to use them for different occasions,” says Gaffney. For a large party, you might choose a milder Brie to be sure of appealing to more guests. But if you’ve invited a few friends for dinner who appreciate fuller tastes, Wegmans Intense Brie would be likely to please.

To make an even bigger impression, consider offering a Brie flight, with all three styles presented together on a cheese board or tray. Guests can sample them all and determine where their palate lies, and the flight is likely to prompt some friendly debate.

“When we were tasting the cheese at Guilloteau, I had trouble resisting third and fourth helpings.”

Becca Clary, Cheese Shop Manager in Wegmans Fairfax (VA) store.”

All of these creamy soft-ripened cheeses—the Bries and the Wegmans triple-crème—love the crisp contrast of sparkling wine: Champagne if the budget allows, or an Italian prosecco, French cava or California bubbly. As for bread, offer a plain, non-sour baguette, a ciabatta or other country-style loaf with no added fat. (Cheese has plenty all by itself.) “Wegmans makes a fantastic organic baguette that is wonderful with any of those cheeses,” says Gaffney.

If you are serving the cheese before dinner, embellish the tray with savory nibbles like olives and Marcona almonds. For an end-of-the-meal cheese course, choose sweeter accompaniments, such as sliced red pears, red grapes or dried apricot halves. Roasted chestnuts or oven-warmed nuts still in the shell are a nice option at holiday time.

*Clockwise from top: On the road to the Lincet Dairy. A pastoral scene near Saligny. Triple Crème in the aging room.*



## Off to Lincet for a taste of triple crème

Also on the agenda was a visit with the cheese experts at Lincet, a firm founded in 1880 in France’s Champagne region—but now located in Saligny, Burgundy. Didier Lincet, who led the Wegmans tour, is a fifth-generation cheesemaker. The company relocated 50 years ago, Lincet explained, because Champagne’s famous vineyards had elbowed out its dairy farms. “There was no milk left in that region—only wine,” he says with a smile.

Lincet produces Wegmans Triple Crème, which is also known as Délice de Bourgogne. Although not a Brie, Délice belongs to the



*From top: Pastureland outside the Lincet Dairy. The Wegmans group sampled local cheeses at a small café in Saligny. Curds are ladled into cylindrical containers. The perforations in the sides allow excess liquid to drain out during the early stages of the cheesemaking process.*

same family of soft-ripened cow’s milk cheeses. Like Brie, it has a bloomy, snow-white mold-covered rind that helps to soften the cheese from the outside in. But there’s a key difference: the milk for Délice has been enriched with crème fraîche—France’s thick cultured cream—to yield a cheese with an especially lush, silky texture. Most tasters find it irresistible. “The reason we selected Délice de Bourgogne to be our Wegmans Triple Crème is that we introduced the cheese with no promotion at all, and it took off on its own,” recalls Gaffney. “Customers loved it.”

At Lincet, the Wegmans staffers had the chance to taste a Délice that was only a few days old—immature, to be sure, but a memorable way to understand what happens to the cheese over time. “It’s night and day,” recalls Joe Hansen, Cheese Department category merchant, who was on the trip. “The flavor intensifies when it’s ripe, along with the texture becoming so creamy.

“This was my favorite cheese from our France trip,” says Sanjay Sharma, Cheese Shop Manager at the Dulles (VA) Wegmans. “It’s easy to see what makes it special. The Lincet Company’s pride really comes through in every wheel they produce for us.”

A ripe Wegmans Triple Crème has a faint mushroom aroma and a plush, fluffy interior that tastes like a cross between whipped butter and whipped cream. Under-ripe, it will be more chalky in texture, with a less developed aroma. Getting the triple crème into customers’ hands at peak ripeness—which means training employees to recognize that moment—is “something we’ve been spending a lot of time on,” says Hansen.

Like Wegmans Brie, Wegmans Triple Crème has a predictable maturation curve. At about four weeks old, it will have its most appealing texture and flavor, and it will stay at that ideal stage for about 10 days before it starts to decline. “There’s a window of time in there,” says Gaffney, who draws a bell-shaped curve to educate staffers about the ripeness timeline for Wegmans Triple Crème and other cheeses. “We want customers to ask our experts to help them select the right soft-ripened cheese that will be perfect for their party on Saturday night.” ■

## Serving your Brie

Be sure to set out your cheese 30 minutes to an hour before serving to let the flavors come to life. It’s best to serve Wegmans Bries and triple crème with a sharp knife, not a table knife, so guests can easily cut through the bloomy rind. Whether to eat the rind is a matter of personal preference, not etiquette, say Gaffney. If the cheese is ultra-ripe, the rind may have a strong aroma, and you may prefer to remove it.

If you’re unsure, try the cheese with its rind before you cut it away. Either way, a ripe Brie or rich triple crème remain among France’s finest contributions to the table.





# simply elegant entertaining

Here are four ways to take a great cheese, add a few special touches, and end up with what could be the most popular spot on your appetizer table—all in about two minutes. Simple, elegant, fast!



## Comté Cheese with nuts

Here, we've paired walnuts, pecans, and almonds with France's Comté cheese because it has a similar fruity-nutty flavor. Trim off one of the rind ends of the cheese, cut narrow slices, and arrange on one of our large cedar planks. Serve with our Cheese Shop's moist, fragrant Fig Cake and a cool Chardonnay, like a White Burgundy.



## Le Coutance Cheese with pomegranate seeds

Because Le Coutance has an intense, rich flavor, it pairs well with tangy pomegranate seeds. Place the cheese round on a wooden plank, slice the top off with a sharp knife and serve with slices of "Vive La Baguette," just like a fondue. Sprinkle a few pomegranate seeds on each serving. Cabernet- or Merlot-based red wines go well with this combination.



## Extra Creamy Dolce Gorgonzola with berries

Blackberries with their tart-sweet tang are an unusually delicious complement to our Extra Creamy Dolce Gorgonzola, a very soft Italian blue cheese. Try it with our Organic Multigrain Baguette slices, presented together on our oval artisan cheese board. The special gorgonzola knife makes serving easier. We love how these flavors blend with a tawny port or Sauterne wine.



*Set out these cheeses 30-60 min before serving.*

## Making it Easier .....



**Oneida Stainless-Steel Cheese Tools**  
This stylish four-piece mirror-finish stainless-steel set contains knives that slice and spread soft-ripened cheeses, plus chisel- and fork-shaped tools that easily break apart firm, hard cheeses like Comté.



**Boska Gorgonzola Knife**  
This stainless-steel knife's specially shaped blade lets you cut and spread the soft, crumbly cheese on baguette slices or crackers.



**Oneida Nutcracker**  
Every household needs a nutcracker, especially at the holidays! This classic makes quick work of getting at the delicious nutmeats from a variety of nuts.



## Wegmans Rich & Buttery Triple Crème with berries

Wegmans Triple Crème Cheese has a rich, mushroomy flavor that's beautifully complemented by fresh blackberries and raspberries. Just slice off the top for easy serving, then arrange the berries with the cheese wheel on a slate cheese board. Serve with "Vive La Baguette" slices, a spreader, and small dessert plates. Our wine team suggests a Pinot Noir, such as a red Burgundy, with this presentation.