

Welcome To Say Cheese | Nine Recipes To Try Now | Selecting The Right Red Wines

# *say* CHEESE

For Cheese Lovers

2010:

THE YEAR TO DISCOVER  
GREAT CHEESES

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Keeping Cheeses at the Peak of Perfection





# Vive La Fromage

Cheese making in France is high art. A sampling of its greatest hits provides delicious evidence of the country's devotion to the craft.

By Kate Leahy

If apple pie is a symbol of America, in France, the same can be said of Brie cheese, a sublimely rich symbol of that nation's food traditions. Easy, approachable and always welcoming, Americans long have looked to the tripe crème treat as a passport to French culture and a stepping stone to further explorations.

Food is approached with near-reverence in France and cheese stands tall as one of its stars. The country boasts the greatest variety of styles in the world and the highest per capita consumption. No surprise, then, that late president Charles de Gaulle is famously quoted as saying: "How can anyone govern a nation that has two hundred and forty-six kinds of cheese?"

The precise number of varieties is hard to pinpoint but certainly has expanded beyond what de Gaulle described. Estimates are that

more than 700 distinct types have been identified although some insist even that number doesn't embrace the full extent. Each year, new cheeses emerge while some of the older styles slip away and become lost to history.

Among the glorious richness, variations in style abound, each a testament to a region and its people. A mild, buttery Brie de Nangis is different from an earthier Brie de Meaux yet both hail from Île de France, the area surrounding Paris.

That's all part of the intrigue. "What's wonderful about France is that each little area has its own cheese that they've been making for years," acknowledges Luan Schooler, a specialty cheese expert in Portland, Oregon. "These are cheeses that are worthy of slowing down to taste."

With the sheer variety of styles, cheese



enthusiasts can study—and happily sample—for years and still stumble upon discoveries. Fortunately, expertise in the field is not a prerequisite to eating these cheeses. The following is a primer on five signature styles. Think of them as Fromage 101.

## Triple Crème

Call this indulgent style a grand gateway to French cheese: These creamy, white rounds are easy to like, often stealing the show. Made by pouring cream into cow's milk curd as it sets, soft-ripening triple crèmes make great

de Comté). With a flavor redolent of nuts and brown butter and a texture that melts easily, this cheese is ideal for cheese trays and also is a versatile partner in the kitchen.

*Types to try:* Arnaud, Jura-Gruyère  
*Other mountain cheeses:* Ossau Iraty, Tomme de Savoie

## Roquefort

An ancient cheese (evidence suggests it predates Rome) Roquefort is a deeply flavorful, slightly crumbly sheep's milk blue cheese

**30:1** Ratio of number of dairy cows whose daily milk output is required to make one wheel of Comté.

dessert cheeses when served with fresh fruit, particularly apples and pears.

*Types to Try:* **Brillat Savarin**, Pierre Robert  
*Other soft-ripening cheeses:* Brie, Camembert

## Chèvre

While goat cheeses are made elsewhere in France, they are a specialty of the west-central Loire Valley, where goats have been raised for centuries. Many are lightly dusted with ash which absorbs surface moisture and helps to preserve the soft cheese. Often served young, these cheeses display an unmistakable goat-milk tang while still exhibiting mild and creamy traits.

*Types to try:* Selles-sur-Cher, Crottin de Chavignol  
*Other goat's milk cheeses:* Tomme de Chevre, Charolais

## Comté

Made in the French Alps, Comté is a top-selling cheese that evolved from the same traditions as Swiss Gruyère (also called Gruyère

from the southeast corner of France. Not a cheese to take lightly, it is sharp and tangy, salty and sweet, perfect when savored after a meal.

*Types to try:* Carles, Le Papillon  
*Other blue cheeses:* Bleu des Causses, Bleu des Basques

## Epoisse

A French cheese primer would not be complete without a glorious stinker

from the washed-rind family—cheeses whose rinds have been rinsed with wine, beer or brandy. Described by many as smelling like “the feet of God,” this runny wonder’s taste is subtle, complex and well deserving of its status as one of the all-time greats.

*Types to try:* **Affidelice**, L’Ami du Chambertin.  
*Other stinky cheeses:* Munster, Langres ♦



## What About the Rind?

Rinds form on cheeses as part of the production process, functioning as both encasement and protective coat. They're often edible; in fact, in France, convention dictates that when serving cheese, each person should get a portion of the rind as well as some from the center. But whether you eat the rind is a matter of preference, says cheese pro Luan Schooler. Some rinds are mild while others can be bitter or ammoniated. In either case, the texture often is markedly different from the interior portion of the cheese.

If venturing into unfamiliar cheese territory, Schooler advises to taste the inside of the cheese first, and then sample a small piece of the rind afterward. “For some people, the rind is too strong,” she says. “They don’t need to eat it.” For others, that rind provides a layer of pungency that brings out so much more in the cheese.